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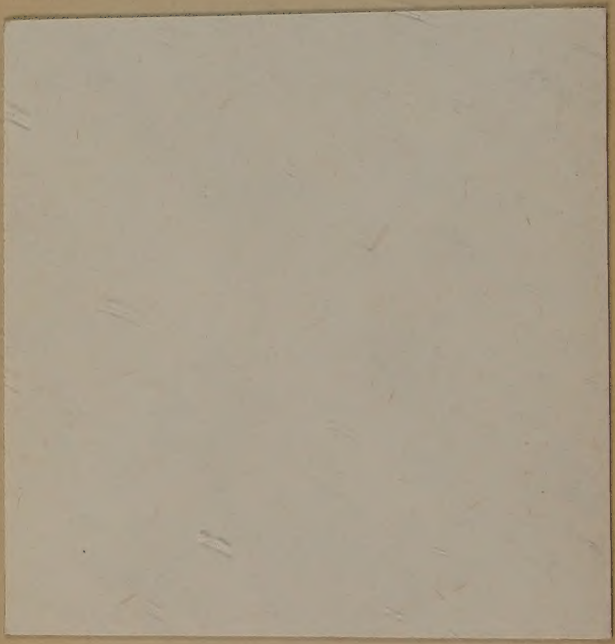

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THE GOLDEN ASSE
AND OTHER ESSAYS

THE GOLDEN ASSE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

MARY ELLEN CHASE

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

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TO
MARY CHASE HERRICK
WHO HERSELF MIGHT BETTER HAVE WRITTEN
THESE ESSAYS

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THE GOLDEN ASSE — A TRIBUTE

THE GOLDEN ASSE — A TRIBUTE

Frater, Ave atque Vale

OLD books suggest old debts, acknowledged, yet unpaid. In this single and momentous respect they differ from those of our own immediate time. For, the manifold question of comparative literary value quite set aside, new books, except it be in their references to the old, rarely, if ever, recall obligations or exact gratitude. The treasures of memory, of long association, do not lie within their uncut pages. They trail no clouds of glory, conceal within their words and phrases no shadowy recollections. To Hazlitt, their idolater, it is the old books which are links in the chain of our consciousness, which "bind together the different scattered divisions of our personal identity." It is they that pervade the external and material life with a luminous and orderly sense of immortality, they that acquaint one early with the haunting, intangible notion of Reality. *They* suggest old debts.

And of all old books surely the classics are the most wistful and reproachful to those of us who, a quarter of a century ago, were mightily concerned with parasangs and hexameters. Our names are written large upon their ledgers. To them we owe certain perceptions which an unalleviated Puritanism would have shorn of beauty — the sense of poetry latent in reverence for aged persons, the sudden apprehending of the power which follows any calm acceptance of the inevitable, the dawning, half-timid perception of a purely physical loveliness. We owe them, too, that train of old and long associations which forms the pattern of the tapestry of our lives. What Latin grammar, bearing on its green back the honorable imprint of "Harkness," ever failed to recall the white-columned academy of some New England town? My own dog-eared Cicero, relentlessly moved a few days ago to make room on the top shelves for the doubtful aristocracy of 1925, engulfed me in such waves of adolescent emotion that in abject apology I bade him come up higher; and the words "Ithaca" and "Odysseus" — the latter even in modern and forbidden guise — suggest always to me the high, rock-rimmed Maine pas-

tures and the dark cliffs above the sea. These are among the long effects of the classics — these the debts we can never discharge save by maintaining in ourselves something of their mellowed and well-ordered dignity.

It was young Lucius Apuleius of Carthage, that juggler of colored words, that notorious magic-monger, that tireless wanderer among the mountains and about the ancient, weird towns of Thessaly, who but lately through his *Asse of Gold* recalled again an old debt, the verbal acknowledgment of which I had long contemplated but never performed. Willingly lost for perhaps the fiftieth time in his perennially fresh adventures with sorcerers and thieves, wolves and serving maids, and dazzled by the rich sparkle of a prose which eighteen hundred years and a poor translation cannot dim, I was yet not insensible to the tug of old associations. And when Lucius, the adventurer, in the house of the sorceress Pamphiles, by a magic ointment and many incantations turned himself into an ass instead of into the owl which he desired to be, his original shape only to be regained by a meal of roses, I made a vow to discharge my indebtedness with all possible grace. For, twenty-five years ago, I

knew such a "plaine asse," fit also to be termed "golden," and in those years all roses held magic possibilities.

I

In the late nineties, among the more remote New England communities barter had not ceased to exist as a convenient and eminently respectable means and method of trade. The Congregational pastor of our Maine village received annually one third of his salary in farm produce and firewood, and gave in exchange theological disputations on the Logos and the Paulian interpretation of the Law. These, however, though given in full measure, pressed down and running over, were seldom mistaken for the Grace of God; and no one felt that the minister was underpaid. Bargains were struck with the doctor, usually in January, by which he, in exchange for certain commodities, — potatoes figured largely in all deals, — would care for the party to the second part, his wife and children, during all reasonable sicknesses over a twelve-month period. And, to complete the professional circle, my father, the village lawyer, entertained few

expectations of payment in cash; for warranty and quitclaim deeds were luxuries not included in the family budgets, and, when they had to be met, one went to the cellar, the pasture, or the stable for the wherewithal.

It was to the last-named repository that the Misses Evelina and Sarah Mansfield, maiden ladies of late middle age, repaired in the spring of 1898. They owed my father for successfully representing their rights over a period of some years in the much disputed matter of a boundary line; they had the highest sense of honor and small cash resources. But they had Richard.

Richard Mansfield, like Modestine, was a diminutive ass, in color a clear gray of the old-fashioned variety, untouched by taupe or mauve. He had been sent the Misses Mansfield on the Christmas preceding by a younger and renegade brother, who years before had run away from home to seek his fortune in the Far West — a chimerical district known to his sisters only through the risqué stories of Mr. Bret Harte. With the season's compliments and his own he had bridged the years by his gift of Richard, a somewhat tardy pledge of his continued esteem and, let us hasten to add,

of his sense of humor. How Oliver Goldsmith would have delighted in the revengeful generosity of that black sheep of the house of Mansfield and in the comic situation engendered thereby!

It is quite safe to say that no fabled or historic personage, not even Henry VIII when he first saw Anne of Cleves in the flesh, was ever more bewildered as to what to do with a new possession than were the Misses Mansfield when Richard, his name unmistakably printed on a steel tag fastened to one ear, was forcibly urged up the slip of the Boston boat amid the guffaws of the crew and passengers. Nor did their bewilderment lessen after he had been placed in the one long-deserted stall of the family stable, his phaeton and glistening new harness inviting their participation in his legitimate activities. With commendable reserve they had told their neighbors that they could not understand their brother; and, indeed, it will be admitted that the case required perception rather than understanding. Miss Sarah, who possessed a fortitude quite lacking in Miss Evelina, had determined, as the snow gave place to spring mud and as Richard's three months of oats began to tell on him, to

lend the only possible dignity to the situation by the demonstration of the utilitarian, if not of the artistic, nature of their gift. Accordingly she had harnessed Richard, adjusting his breeching with trembling fingers from behind an empty flour barrel which she had thought best to place between him and her, and had taken Miss Evelina for a drive — a drive so fraught with misery and disgrace because of certain distressing habits of Richard, for the first time revealed, that the cheeks of both ladies burned for hours thereafter. What wonder then that Miss Sarah, tormented in the night watches, did not tarry for the day, to arouse her sister when my father suddenly appeared before her distracted mental vision, not in the guise of a relentless creditor, but in that of a deliverer!

According to the town veterinarian Richard was thirteen years old when in the spring of 1898 he made the inconsequential journey from the Mansfield stable to our own. His gray coat was shaggy with a winter's growth of hair, his brown eye was kindly, his underjaw determined, again like Father Adam's beast in Monastier. On his left side, well rounded with the Mansfield corn and oats, his thick hair

had long since given place to two letters, T L, cruelly branded into his tough black hide. That neat Roman type afforded us material for endless cogitations — the meaning of the letters in terms of words, their importance as to time and place, the certain torture that Richard had endured on the occasion of their impress. His long ears differed from those of others of his species only in his manipulation of them. From him we early learned the significance of earmarks as a means of identification, for those two long features were the outward and visible signs of certain temperamental stages. Usually carrying them at a not unpleasant obtuse angle, he brought them far forward in a benignant expression when he was extraordinarily pleased or expectant, lowered the left when he was disgruntled or dejected and in periods of reflection — for his was a contemplative nature — laid both closely back upon his neck. His short tail was easily disconcerted and melancholy in the extreme.

How often had we occasion to bless that Far-Western humorist! Those were the days of pride in large families, and no less than a score of children from the immediate neigh-

borhood gathered in our field and orchard on Saturdays and during the long summer vacations to participate in new plays and games made possible by Richard. A kindlier creature never existed. Surely I cannot forget his goodness, even though I have until now neglected to chronicle it. His was that "sweet reasonableness" which, we are told, was characteristic of the saints. As the ridgepole of a tent he would stand still almost indefinitely while we crawled in and out under the blankets and old quilts which we had draped across his back. For as Thiasus of Corinth decked the ass Lucius "with purple coverings, with a bridle of silver, with pictured cloths, and with shrilling bells," so we hung Richard's neck with daisy chains, caparisoned his back with the discarded parlor portières, and led him in triumphal procession about the neighborhood.

He possessed, however, an impregnable self-respect, an integrity of nature which forbade imposition. In simpler phrase, he knew when he had had enough. He would willingly carry six children of varying sizes, stationed from his shoulders to that downward slope of his back which made riding perilous, across the fields or along the street until his dignity and

sense of fitness reproved him. Then, suddenly stopping, he would bend his knees in a motion only barely perceptible which we children called "crumbling." If this warning passed unheeded — and, after having experienced the delightful sequel, we seldom heeded it — he invariably went on a few steps, and then, again stopping, crumbled unmistakably. Fair warning that! And yet we awaited the climax with excited giggles. It came. Simultaneously lowering his long neck and raising his hind quarters, he deposited us all, safely and gently, on the ground like a line of fallen dominoes, stayed for a moment to survey the situation, and then galloped away at an unwonted pace, granting only dark and threatening glances to those of us who were so unreasonable as to ask just then for more.

On holidays he shared in our high carnival. The "barly and beans" which the Lady Charites fed the golden asse in gratitude for her safe deliverance from Thessalian thieves were but poor dainties when compared with Richard's Thanksgiving feast of vegetables and sugar. And on Christmas he was as a favored guest. For had not the minister, forsaking the Logos for a season, reminded us of the

part played by Richard's forbears in the Bethlehem stable, during the anxious flight into Egypt, and on the Jerusalem streets, ringing with hosannas?

I can recall with a vividness almost painful every detail of our Christmas Eve pilgrimages to the stable — the warm, contented smell there in strange contrast to the cold in which we shivered, the high rafters and beams thrown into great, uncertain shadow in the swaying lantern light, the occasional heavy stir of the quiet animals, and the wide gray eyes of my sister Cynthia, watching Roger hang with careful deliberation Richard's great red stocking on a nail just outside the window of his stall. In four hours, while we slept, would they in the stable, on the stroke of midnight, kneel in dumb adoration — Lady, my father's thoroughbred mare, Constancy, the cow, and Richard? Or was it all just a tale told us like so many others? It was hard to imagine Lady kneeling. She was haughty in her blue blood, overbearing, not easily humbled. And Constancy was a creature who justified her existence by good works rather than by faith. But Richard — my sister Cynthia never doubted Richard, standing

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there in the light-shot darkness, his great ears expectantly forward as though at once awaiting the heavenly summons and challenging me to greater confidence. Nor would she ever consent to my desire for visible confirmation. For hers was that Faith beloved of God — unassailable, and rendered tarnished and languid by proof.

II

In those beneficent pre-Ford days the country roads were open and safe for our journeyings; and the miles were many which Cynthia and I traversed with Richard. Those were the opening years of our teens — a time fraught with new sensations. The smallest details, heretofore unimportant, became monstrous with significance. There was a strange element of pain in all lovely things — wild roses against a gray boulder, the glimpse of the sea from a hilltop, a flock of goldfinches following the roadside in scalloped flight. Vaguely conscious that life was somehow different, we spent long days along the roads with Richard, calling on relatives some miles distant or driving to berry pastures inaccessible on foot.

Early he revealed to us the most distressing of his habits — that which had so fired the sallow cheeks of the Misses Mansfield and made further journeying with him incommensurate with prestige and position. He insisted upon periods of rest and complete relaxation, and never felt in any way encumbered by his harness or the shafts of his phaeton. His powers of selection were of the highest; I never knew him to choose an unattractive spot. Five miles from home — it mattered little whether he was approaching or departing therefrom — he would select a hilltop affording a sea breeze, or a mossy hollow by a spring, draw the phaeton to the roadside out of the sun in spite of our frantic tuggings upon the reins, stand still for a moment to assure himself that he had chosen well and that all was in readiness, and then with deliberate care lie down with a long, grateful sigh, his head invariably upon soft ground, some lush grass, tender alder twigs, or swaying buttercups well within reach of his eager nose.

His periods of rest were impossible of calculation. I have known him to lie for three hours in a particularly desirable spot on a particularly warm day. They were never less

than an hour; and we early learned the uselessness of urging. Like his prototype, the wild ass of Job, he regarded not "the crying of the driver," nor did he pay heed to all manner of chastisements. There was nothing to do but to accept the inevitable.

In the second summer of his life with us, however, we discovered a possible means of inducement. He had, let it be known, an inordinate weakness for carrots. Never was the smallest exhibited in his presence without awakening a gleam in the depth of his eyes, an expectant uplifting of his ears, and in his underjaw a perceptible yielding to temptation; and not infrequently did the orange succulence and vernal fragrance of one of these vegetables, if held just without his reach, lure him to rise and continue on his way. Sometimes, too, one served in yet another capacity; for when his usual pace of two and one-half miles an hour became too tedious for endurance, either Cynthia or I, seizing a carrot, would spring from the phaeton and run at top speed ahead of him, always allowing him first, however, a scant but overwhelming nibble. By that simple device many a stretch of level road was briskly covered, with one of us perspiring

onward and the other holding the lines and glorying in the increased rate of progress.

But the time came, and that soon, when the irksomeness of Richard's hours of meditation and refreshment gave place to beneficence, when the cups of patient waiters began to brim with old and heady wine. It was Cynthia who first proposed bringing books, and it was my father who proffered the huge green umbrella. Then, indeed, we wanted for nothing. Richard sighing grateful sighs, his head in the cool moss of some wayside brook; the warm sun tracing the shadows of buttercups and timothy upon the brown road; Cynthia and I reading from the same book beneath the green umbrella.

There was an abandonment in reading in those days which I would fain catch again. Books existed for and by themselves; they established no relations, signified nothing in my mundane world. Words were intoxicants. I tasted, smelled, touched them. They were unknown fruit, strange and delectable, fragrance floating across wide seas, moonlight on still water. They were as remote from my stupid, halting speech as I was from my immediate and material surroundings. I never said them

aloud, but I dwelt with them "in faery lands forlorn."

True to the Apostle's injunction, we were then "careful for nothing." There was doubtless added abandonment in the knowledge that no household task or ruleless baby could call us away at the worst possible moment, that the only hindrance to two hours of unalloyed enjoyment was the extremely unlikely chance that Richard would want to move on. But be the reasons what they were, let them lie in early adolescence or in an unusual situation, it is certain that books had before held no such lure, nor have they since.

Cynthia always finished before me — she read in great, thirsty gulps, not pausing for breath — and when she was ready to turn the page she sighed and tapped her foot with exasperation against the dashboard. But I was obdurate. I wanted time to say words and phrases over to myself, and I took it. I remember that in beginning *The Lady of the Lake* I paused long over

In lone Glenartney's hazel shade.

That line engendered a thrill which I could

not afford to lose, in spite of her very obvious irritation.

To this day certain hill summits, fern coverts, and wayside springs in that loveliest part of the Maine coast are sacred, and will ever remain so, to certain persons and situations in books. A flat, mossy rock on the top of one high hill — a hill commanding a far-reaching view of Penobscot Bay — is dedicated forever to the stout Marchioness of Castlewood and to her irate reception, from her curtained bed, of the king's soldiers. How grudgingly we acquiesced that afternoon in Richard's sudden desire to press toward the mark! A wild-apple tree in a roadside hollow recalls always our tearful accompaniment of poor Smike when he ran away from school and went on his pitiful journey in search of the Nickelbys. We had cried, silently and shamefacedly at first, casting surreptitious glances in order to be assured that each was not cognizant of the other's woe, until Cynthia, unable to bear it any longer, threw reserve to the winds and sobbed unrestrainedly in my blue gingham lap. By a roadside spring, sheltered from the sun by an overhanging bank of small firs and brake ferns, John Ridd

made love to Lorna in such impassioned accents that Cynthia and I were cross and abrupt with each other in our efforts to pretend that such was but wearisome reading.

All those books which to-day beggar the attempts of the voluble moderns were ours in those days between grammar school and college — Dickens, Scott, Dumas, Marryat, William Black, Stevenson — and not a few of them were read by the roadside under the green umbrella. And as we read, Richard rested, his eyes sometimes closed in sleep, sometimes wide in contemplation. Did he see the things to which, for the moment, situation and suspense blinded us — a dragon fly in blue and bronze, the jeweled shadow of a water spider on an amber pool? Who can tell?

We must have presented a most humorous picture to the passers-by — I can still remember their smiles — and yet I do not think we ever thought the situation itself really funny. One of the functions of early adolescence is to dull the sense of humor; and unlike the Misses Mansfield we were untroubled by the fear of a waning prestige. Recollection does, however, depict one occasion upon which Cynthia's sense of the ridiculous proved itself ex-

istent in spite of adolescence. The family was to spend an August week-end upon an uncle's farm six miles distant, and, to allow for Richard's pace and idiosyncrasies, Cynthia and I had started hours ahead of my father and mother, who were to follow in the surrey with the younger children. After four miles of the hot and dusty road Richard sought a convenient spring and stretched out his tired legs with a sigh that betokened a long and drowsy stay. The afternoon for once dragged — we had long since finished *Kidnapped* and had brought no other book — until Cynthia was seized with the aspiration to utilize her slight and recent acquaintance with Milton. Carefully unfolding the paper which held our week-end supply of accessories, she chalked thereon certain words with a stubby pencil, unearthed from my pocket, and pinned the sheet to the back of the phaeton. So that my father, driving up a half hour later with Lady, whose fine head twitched with scorn at the sight of the prostrate Richard, read, I fear with greater pride in his children than in the poet:

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

III

It was my grandfather who, during his annual visit the summer following Richard's advent, told us of Lucius Apuleius and of his magic transformation into a "plaine asse." He was a prince of story-tellers, and forty years spent among the classics had granted him endless equipment. Moreover, he entirely lacked the mellowless pedantry that too often clings to college professors of seventy. His stories were rich with the richness of their background, sparkling with the light from his extraordinarily blue eyes, active with the movement of his quick and lively words. Sitting with him in the orchard, Cynthia and I listened, while Richard roamed near by, munching some late buttercups and hearing, we knew not how consciously, the tragic adventures of the Asse Lucius.

Even then, in the fragmentary form given to us, we thought it a golden tale, as thought Marius and Flavian in Pater's gracious book. We had our favorite parts. Cynthia was inclined toward the sad adventures of the Lady Charites, kidnapped by thieves on her marriage day, her escape by means of the Asse,

their recapture, and the savage plans for their terrible death, the final strategy which brought them once again safely home. She loved especially their triumphal entry into the Citie when the Asse "cryed stoutly," making the town to ring again with his shrilling sound; but the shining which was always in her eyes dimmed at the aftermath when the Lady Charites, like Juliet, must die for her love and loyalty. She loved, too, the tale of Lucius's shadow on the wall, which mercifully discovered to the kind soldiers his hiding place and that of his wicked master. As for me, no part of my grandfather's recital matched in any way the conclusion, when the Asse, by eating the garland of roses, regained his human shape. There was wizardry in his tongue, I am sure of it; for, as he talked, there passed through our quiet orchard the procession to Isis. Masked figures in strange guises, women in white with wreaths of flowers, trumpeters with trumpets of gold and silver, priests in purple with vessels of gold, and at last the high priest himself bearing the roses which the goddess had sent to the prayerful Asse.

"So you see," concluded my grandfather, looking in turn at Cynthia and me, "so you

see how Lucius Apuleius became himself again. Merely a question of roses. How do you know that this Lucius of yours is really an ass? He woke me this morning calling 'Never, never!' just as the Golden Asse did when they accused him of stealing Milo's treasure. If you want to keep him like this, Cynthia, beware of roses."

I felt sorry for Cynthia, for I knew the matter would stay with her until she had decided it one way or the other. There was never any middle ground for her. Either a thing was true or it was not. And at thirteen making up one's mind is neither simple nor easy.

My grandfather was, in fact, devoted to Richard — Lucius, he called him. He was greatly disturbed twenty-five years ago over the speed of the world. He did not like the way horse cars were everywhere giving place to electric ones, and the rumors of successful horseless carriages distressed him. He talked almost angrily about the invasion of the telephone. I think Richard's meditative ways reassured him. He used to ask the minister, who had been a college classmate, to drive with him; and the two white-haired old gentlemen would start toward the open country, quite

overlapping the narrow seat of the phaeton with their black frock coats. Richard's insistence upon hours of complete rest delighted them both. At the supper table my grandfather would laugh uproariously at them, throwing back his fine white head. One August day Cynthia and I, returning from the pasture with laden berry pails, came upon the trio at Richard's favorite spring. Quite unaware of our approach, my grandfather and the minister continued some heated argument. They had twisted themselves about on the narrow seat until they uncomfortably faced each other; their straw hats were off; their white heads and anxious hands gesticulated eagerly. Cynthia thought the subject probably the Logos, but we never really knew. Meanwhile Richard lay in the cool grass beside the spring, his mind also concerned with ultimate realities and not with those of time and space.

But I did not know until the second year of Richard's stay with us how seriously Cynthia had taken my grandfather's warning of the roses. We were driving one Saturday afternoon in July in search of meadow rue for church decoration when Richard stopped suddenly by a high bank which the spring rains

had excavated sufficiently to form an agreeable shelter and over which blossoming wild roses grew in abundance. Before he had had time to complete the necessary arrangements for his rest, Cynthia had bounded from the phaeton, seized his bridle, and by mere force of will induced him to move on a few steps beyond the roses. When she came again to the phaeton with *Children of the New Forest*, which she had procured from the back, her cheeks were pink and she avoided my eyes. Then I understood what I have never since forgotten: that hers was a Faith Militant as well as a Faith Triumphant.

IV

Ten years were granted to Richard Mansfield after he left the Far West for the State of Maine. He died at twenty-three, a ripe old age. His last years would, I think, have tried one of a smaller nature. We were in college, negligent and very busy, and, I fear, we quite cruelly forgot him. But may he not well have reaped the confident fruit of those long hours of contemplation, have become careless of little things like neglect? He came of a noble

race. To whom of us has it been granted to see thrice the angel of the Lord with a drawn sword, once in the way, again in a path of the vineyards, and yet again in a narrow place?

Remembering his patient acquiescence as a playmate, I contend that he was at once a Stoic and a practical Christian; recalling his sober delight in the things of this world, I dub him an Epicurean; seeing him again lying for long hours by the roadside, I even question if he was not a disciple of Plato, probing into the nature of Justice or of Temperance or of Fortitude. Finally, holding in thankful and lasting remembrance the long and luminous effects of those great and old books of my childhood, I salute him in the words of Catullus: *Frater, Ave atque Vale* — Brother, Hail and Farewell!

ON KITCHENS AND CLOISTERS

ON KITCHENS AND CLOISTERS

THE cloister at Saint Hilda's Convent at once separates and unites the convent kitchen and the chapel of Our Lady of Victory. The two verbs would seem to be at variance; in fact, one is likely through force of temperament alone to take his choice between them. As for me, I am inclined irrevocably toward the latter. Recalling those "common gifts" of the faithful to the early Church, the offertory of fresh bread loaves, of ears of corn and clusters of grapes, of cakes of finest flour, I see little reason for the idea of separation. Saint Monica, the mother of the great Augustine, rose early, one remembers, to bake her own loaves, which she thereafter distributed in person to the village churches. Doubtless she carried to Mass, concealed in the folds of her gown, some such delectable and aromatic odors as I have more than once enjoyed, kneeling by Sister Ambrosine, the mistress of Saint Hilda's kitchen, and noting in what a sweet and seemly manner they are wont to ascend with the incense above the white altar.

I should banish forever the notion that a kitchen is separated from a chapel. Once in a high Swiss hamlet on a clear summer morning I attended an early Mass in a tiny, rose-covered church. The priest was frail and old; the congregation consisted of a handful of peasants, a kind and attentive dog, and me; but our responses were immeasurably strengthened and swelled by the loud and cheerful tones of the priest's housekeeper, who, in his cottage adjoining the church, attended at once to her own devotions and his breakfast. Through the open windows came her lively voice, fervently praising the Lord; her pots and pans were the tabors and the cymbals adjured by the psalmist; and, mingling with the fragrance of the high, thin air, came the warm, comfortable smell of her ham and coffee. Well did Saint Francis de Sales extol the similar household devotions of Saint Anne and Saint Martha; and Saint Teresa, in *The Way of Perfection*, it will be remembered, warns her young nuns against irreverence for sculleries and kitchens.

In Gloucester — loveliest of cloisters! — the hawkers' door leading to the kitchen immediately adjoined the cloister walk. What

cries and scents and colloquies may well have drifted in those lancet windows, echoing through those arched and shadowy recesses, and dying away among the soaring, fanlike tracery of that lofty roof! At their desks in the carrels of the scriptorium, intent on their illumination of psalters and books of hours with gold leaf and blue dyes, more than one Benedictine Brother of Saint Peter must have felt a twitching of the nostrils at the cry of fresh salmon from the Severn or of early strawberries from the valley of the Wye. Who knows, indeed, what delicate golden spiral completing an initial letter, what depths and shades of blue in flowery borders, what eager-faced ox or ass may have owed a better being to the simple proximity of that monastery kitchen? And if to some more contemplative Brother, sitting in his carrel between the fluted columns, there appeared from the high palaces of heaven a singing company of saints to chant their litanies in the cloister close, there came no less into the thoughts and the hands of those Gloucester masons, from good Gloucester bread and cheese and ale, the exquisite, unearthly traceries of those beautiful aerial arches.

The south walk of the Gloucester cloisters, claiming and receiving all possible rays of that niggardly English sunshine, utilized them to the full by throwing upon the broad stone floor latticed and leaf-strewn shadows from its high windows. Saint Hilda's south walk is recompensed in its endowment of sunlight for its lack of age and mellowed beauty. Rare, indeed, are those summer mornings which withhold the sun from its gray arches and columns, from its lancet, trefoiled windows, which Sister Ambrosine on her way to Mass has swung wide upon their hinges. Shadows, too, has Saint Hilda's from a great grapevine that, covering the western wall with its riotous life, sends, each in its own season, the sunlit counterparts of bare tendrils, of leaves and of fruit clusters to dance upon the walls and to rest uneasily upon the stone floor. And as for the prospect from the westward-facing windows of that south walk, Gloucester itself assuredly has nothing to show more fair.

Pacing the cloister in silence on their way from Mass to breakfast, the Sisters glimpse through the narrow openings the high chapel porch with its sculptured saints. Below, the land falls to a tiny lake, rises again to wooded

knolls, and slopes once more to the great river. Sandstone bluffs on its farther side are purple in the morning light and tease the gaze yet higher to blue, tumbling hills and a wide, clear expanse of blue and silver sky. And although the nuns, fretting not "at their narrow convent room" and bathed in a deeper, surer knowledge, do not need the information, one who has known both places will see in the quiet sloping of the land and the rising of the hills a likeness between those Gloucestershire valleys loved by Wordsworth, and this sunnier, newer country.

Rain, too, at Saint Hilda's can never be that intrusive, wetter rain of southern England. On soggy mornings in that chill cloister how welcome to the shivering monks of Gloucester must have been the rich, warm odor of roast beef, browning slowly on the kitchen spits! What comfort in even the lowly smell of well-smoked herring as it fought for supremacy with the fog and the mist! Saint Hilda's cloister enjoys rain that is less tenacious, less personal in nature. The skies that pour down their crystal and silver are beneficent rather than wilful of face, meditative rather than sullen. Having, in fact, watched a summer rain

through the open windows of the cloister, one is, not infrequently, driven to wish — curious as it sounds — for less sunlight.

On such a mid-afternoon the gray walls take on a purple tinge like Massachusetts hills on a dull November day. The rain falls upon the roof in a subdued, rhythmic undertone, strikes with a sharp spatter the wide leaves of the grape-vine, and drips from the eaves into widening pools with clear musical tones like the running notes of the clavichord. The poplars on the slopes increase their silver; the stalks of larkspur over the distant garden hedge are wisps of blue smoke.

At this hour of the afternoon, the nuns are at prayer, at work, asleep. I am alone in the cloister except for one Sister who stands at the dim turn of the south into the chapel walk, tells her beads and looks out upon the rain. She is a Dominican, sojourning for a season among her black-robed friends. The deep cream-color of her habit against the gray walls on this day is like the color of a pale daffodil against a mass of purple. Watching her quiet figure, hearing in the brooding stillness the click of her rosary beads as she lifts and drops them, I think of Pater saying: "All life

should be conceived as a kind of listening," and of Saint Teresa: "The kingdom of heaven is won by a wise passiveness."

At the sound of the benediction bell she goes into the chapel. The Sisters pass me silently, the echo of their beads the undertones for the thin, clear notes of raindrops on the pools below. The flushed cheeks and fragrant skirts of Sister Ambrosine assure me there is fresh spice-cake for supper. Soon the organ throbs through the soft, muted air, and voices singing the "Sancta Maria, Mater Dei" echo and reëcho through the uniting cloisters. They reach the kitchen and add their consecrating power to milk and bread, meat and spice-cake, objects of poetic and spiritual significance surely could we but break through the veil of our familiarity with them, fit symbols of life, "gratia plena," indeed!

"NOT IN CADIZ"

"NOT IN CADIZ"

I

My sister Cynthia shares with Charles Lamb his distaste for newspapers. But whereas he complains of an unsatisfied curiosity, she suffers from no curiosity whatever. Her mind as she takes her morning dose of a metropolitan daily is in precisely the same state as it was twenty-five years ago when she submitted to her tablespoonful of sulphur and molasses before breakfast on chill March and April days. So is her face. It registers the same grim determination to get through with a bad business, the same innate conviction that nothing is to be gained from such a procedure, the same exasperated patience at being forced to yield, then to family faith and custom, now to her own stern sense of duty as a citizen. And to add to these collective emotions contempt and scorn, one has but to remind her of Horace Greeley's gilded metaphor, which hailed the Press as the "bright sunbeam of truth."

Imagine then my surprise when but yesterday over our toast and coffee I watched these usual sentiments put to rout by an unmistakable eagerness, which in turn gave way to that quick excitement occasioned by the sudden touching of an old memory, long unawakened. I knew her eyes were shining, though she did not look at me as she passed the paper folded so that I could not fail to see what she had seen. It was between an old divorce in Hollywood and a new revolution in Mexico, and it had to do only with an old Spanish town. A special correspondent with an eye to good business had written it for the Consolidated Press.

Cadiz was the old town. It, he informed us in his breezy, slang-shot style, was in reality the step-mother of America. Had it but held on to South American silver and escaped Sir Francis Drake, who in the sixteenth century sank its fleet for England, garlic instead of corn would have been planted around Plymouth Rock, we should at this moment beyond the shadow of a doubt be eating *chile con carne* instead of baked beans and clam chowder, and the Spanish royal children would be summering at Bar Harbor instead of

on the Bay of Biscay! Not for one minute, he said, would he have us forget what we owed to Cadiz. Our debts, in point of fact, were too numerous to mention, but he wished to list especially for our grateful consideration such valued possessions as California and Hollywood, Florida, the Mexican situation, and the Spanish omelet!

But that which had lighted Cynthia's eyes was not in the paper. That I knew full well. The careless, clap-trap words of that bumptious young reporter, sitting, much to our discomfiture, on the white wall of the old Spanish town, were lost to her and to me in a train of images reaching back to our seacoast village in the 'nineties when Cadiz was our word of words, the leaven making lighter our stern and daily fare of precept and example, the key, unlocking forbidden doors; reaching, too, to one now dead who had given to us our knowledge and our love of that joyous city.

II

We were all children of seafaring families. Our grandparents had rounded the Horn, had, like Columbus, put in at the Azores for

repairs and supplies, had, waiting a cargo, summered in Shanghai. They, in Sarah Orne Jewett's fine phrase, had never mistaken their native parishes for the whole of the world instead of a part thereof. Thus we had early become familiar with the Sargasso Sea where strange and colorful creatures of the ocean leaped from a watery, feathery jungle; with Mozambique on its coral reefs; with the dirt and heat and confusion of Calcutta and Bombay; and thus, too, there had early crept into the minds of most of us, through oft-repeated and glorified recitals, the effulgent idea that somewhere within the confines of this earth there existed a place all-sufficient in beauty, or in strangeness, or in breath-taking, consuming excitement. These Meccas, goals of our mental pilgrimages, were, of course, relative, depending upon the routes which our ancestors' ships had taken. The dream place of one was Singapore; of another, Genoa; of a third, Martinique.

Cynthia and I had early taken Cadiz for our own. When in later years we tried to discover the exact time of its birth in our consciousness, we failed. It seemed to have been born with us, like the accepted and familiar

objects of our childhood, to be a part of us like our hands and our feet. We could no more catch the swift passing into us of its glistening whiteness than we could recall the first time we had become aware of our blossoming orchard or the dripping panicles of our lilacs in a soft June rain. It belonged with all those inseparable things which made up our lives, with those influences and possessions which had not *come*, but *were*, just as light at God's command did not come, but *was*.

And yet, although our baffled memories refused to register the connection, our Grandmother had been the source of Cadiz. In this instance she had been like God, for seeing our need of that white and shining city, she had in some dim, unsubstantial time commanded it to be part of us, and lo! it was. In those imperceptible days, far beyond the reach of memory, she told us how blue was the sea that lounged against the high walls of Cadiz, how white its tall, balconied houses, the domes and spires of its great cathedral, even the shadowy lines that marked its narrow streets.

When concrete images began at last to extricate themselves from the quiet formlessness of our earliest impressions, there was Cadiz,

and there, above all else, was its whiteness. That high wall which kept out the sea was white; and white were its turrets and its five gates; white were the roofs and the chimneys of Cadiz, the high balconies overlooking its wide harbor where came the square-rigged ships with their white, billowing sails. In the hot, dazzling light of a southern sun, the whiteness of its highest spires was lost in fine lines of silver reaching heavenward. In the cool blue darkness of a summer night, Cadiz from the deck of our grandfather's ship was like some great, crumpled white flower floating on the sea.

Cadiz, though rich in chroniclers, can never through its long ages have enjoyed a better one than Grandmother. Even the scribes of King Solomon, listing on their rolls the gold, and silver, the ivory, and apes, and peacocks, which, if we can believe the author of the Books of the Kings, came once in three years from Tarshish, the ancient Cadiz, to Jerusalem, can hardly have spoken to one another in tones more awed than hers as she listed for Cynthia and me the glories of the Cadiz of seventy years ago. Artemidorus of Ephesus, and Polybius, the Greek historian, came in the second century

B.C. to study the ebb and the flow of the tides of Cadiz, tides unparalleled in the Mediterranean. They wrote learned treatises on their discoveries, but were they in the end more fortunate than Grandmother, who again and again assured us that one still day she saw through the deep, transparent water a solid block of black masonry, a portion of the first foundation of that old, old city? Juvenal and Martial alike in their satires and epigrams write of "*jocosæ Gades*," Cadiz the Joyous She was a city of Venus, they say, famed throughout the Roman world for her dancing girls and her cookery; and in this they agree substantially with Grandmother, who, with looks somewhat daring and significant, early confided to Cynthia and me the charming wickedness of her earthly paradise.

Perhaps, indeed, to our conscience-ridden little minds, so sadly beset by Puritanism, the lure of Cadiz lay in its easy gayety; perhaps the spell it cast over Grandmother originated in the same source. There was, we early noted, an inexplicable divorcement between the Sunday-school lesson on Temperance, which she taught us with zeal, and her memory of some clear, red wine in a tall fragile glass, which she

had once drunk in a Spanish garden with palm trees and great, heavy-scented flowers; between the attitude of the "better people" of our village in regard to dancing and the picture she again and again gave to us of the flying feet of Spanish beauties weaving a fandango amid the sound of laughter and tambourines and the quick, staccato hum of guitars; between her frequent condemnations of the moth and rust of earthly treasure and a certain red-lacquered box in her bottom drawer, which contained a black lace mantilla, a silver ring with a ruby in the shape of a heart, and two turquoise earrings. The last, be it said quickly, were rarely lifted from their own case of carved ivory and then only with apologies and after great pressure. But precept fell as always before example, and Cadiz remained to us the white and joyous city. Indeed, many years after, in reading *The Bible in Spain* we were seized with impatience mounting to disgust over George Borrow's chief concern as to Cadiz — that he could find no demand for the New Testament throughout that wayward place, whose "ideas respecting religion," he declares testily, "were anything but satisfactory!"

III

Sunday afternoons were dedicated to Cadiz and to other "strands afar remote." Then, in spite of the alleged impossibility of serving two masters, we turned with a never-satisfied devotion from a morning spent in wandering with the Children of Israel or in missionarying with Paul and Silas, to those far-reaching journeys of our own ships and sailors. Then, secure in her two hours of early meditation, her hunger and thirst after righteousness decently filled by the morning sermon, Grandmother returned to Cadiz.

Weather and the season permitting, we sat in the orchard, and it is to this tree-shaded spot that our memory more often returns than to the library fireplace reserved for rainy and winter Sundays. At two o'clock Grandmother crossed the lawn with dignity, her little figure in black taffeta surmounted by a black parasol. A few reverent paces behind her one of us followed, bearing a low, red chair. The others, for we were frequently supplemented by neighboring children, brought up the rear.

The tone and manner of these processions were strongly ritualistic. We descended the

long, low terrace, crossed the driveway, and passed through the white gate leading to the orchard, one of the rear participants having hurried silently forward to undo the hinge. Still silent, we trailed through the orchard grass and stood in a circle under the old russet tree, a group of attendant acolytes in gingham and blue serge, watching our leader place the red chair in position against the gnarled gray trunk. Nor did we sink cross-legged to our places on the ground until Grandmother, with a faint and perfumed swish of taffeta, had seated herself, one delicate hand, in which blue veins intersected one another like miniature and meandering streams, holding the parasol, the other toying with a fan of ebony and lace.

She did not begin with Cadiz. Other tales invariably preceded it. But the surety of its sunshine irradiated their recital, the perfume of its flowers permeated their every detail. It was tutelar goddess of them all, waiting only for Grandmother's good time to receive meet reverence and adoration. Thus it was that the strong and wholesome fare of Grandfather's wreck off Ireland in the spring of '48, of the woeful capsizing off Bermuda of *The Bride* in '52, and of the total loss with all on board

of the *Judith Blair* in a North Sea catastrophe of '54, was flavored by the irresistible knowledge of more delicate viands to follow.

These tales did not vary perceptibly from week to week. There was always the eulogy of Grandfather, who, intrepid youth that he was, bore with gallantry the loss of his two brothers, endured the torture of tossing about for two days on a spar in the Irish Sea, underwent typhoid fever in the cow-crib of an Irish peasant, and, still undismayed, returned home to fall in love with Grandmother, — with Grandmother, who in a pink calico dress and a poke bonnet with pink roses under the brim sang from the church choir-loft "A mighty fortress is our God" at the funeral service held for his brothers! There was always in the tale of *The Bride*, which had borne Grandmother on her ill-fated honeymoon, the one high and tense moment of drama when, having recounted her sufferings during a three days' hurricane, herself bound to the mast of the capsized ship, she quickened our senses by sharply recalling to our minds the stupendous knowledge that she, our Grandmother, had been saved by a miracle! That strange and sudden light over sky and sea — who could

account for it? — that hurried lowering of boats by the rescuing brig, heretofore unable to work in the darkness — the tardy saving of them all! And lo! our Grandmother in taffeta, beneath her parasol, was clasping hands by the Grace of God with the daughter of Jairus and with Simon Peter's wife's mother! And in the loss of the *Judith Blair*, that most gracious of clippers built at Maine docks from Maine oak and pine, there was always left uppermost in our imaginations, like that sudden, incomprehensible pity which swept the mind of Pater's child Florian in the great house, the ceaseless rolling of gray, cold waters, seen and heard by no living soul!

But Cadiz! How she grew from week to week! How from hidden dimnesses of Grandmother's mind there sprang into the light new and glittering persons, more señoritas in slow procession along the white promenades fringing the city between the ramparts and the sea, more señors in red cloaks carelessly twirling flowers in their white teeth! How her fancy-aided memory created for itself bright images to become endowed at once with truth! Flowering trees — multiply our orchard by one hundred and the result would be but a mere bou-

quet! — shadows dappling white marble — the hot fragrance of grapes ripening in sun-swept vineyards — the cool falling of water in moonlit gardens —

Once in such a garden on a warm spring night a wonderful thing happened to Grandmother. It was on her second voyage to Cadiz. Her sailor husband had left her in the great house of a Spanish merchant while he sailed eastward through the Straits. The long, slow hours of her twenty-third birthday had passed that April day, the gay, chattering people in the strange house quite unaware of any meaning which they held for her, she herself swept by mounting loneliness for a Maine hill-farm, probably at that moment dimmed by the racing mists of an April rain. Yet the Fates had decreed that the day should not pass without event! Late that night, unable to sleep, she stood by her high window and gazed beyond the silent court and over the tops of the still houses to the wide, moonlit harbor, black-etched with the masts and spars of tarrying ships. And as she watched, sadly conscious that at last the strange and unfamiliar had failed to minister unto her, she heard in the courtyard below, the quick, shy tread of

muffled footsteps, the swift, whispering brush of shrubbery, smelt the fragrance of crushed flowers rising toward her like an invisible mist through the warm, palpable air.

Then her startled ears caught the first thin notes of the guitar below her window; her incredulous eyes saw the red cloak, the plumed hat of a young man who had dined the night before in this house of her sojourn; her abashed, reproving consciousness warned her to draw her curtains from so presumptuous an intruder.

"But you didn't, Grandmother!" we cried, in the pause she always made to insure her reckless daring its full and requisite measure of admiration.

"Not at once," she said, toying with her fan. "Here at home I must have, but not in Cadiz. Things are different there. I waited until he had sung the first song and thrown the rose from his hat far, far up to my balcony, and then — for just a moment, children — I leaned from the railing to thank him before I — withdrew!"

"Not in Cadiz!" Magic phrase, breaking for delicious, venturesome moments the shackles from our imaginations, freeing us

for the nonce from all the grievous weight of the armor of righteousness with which we were early charged to clothe our heads and feet and to gird about our loins! "Not in Cadiz!" In that white and shining city one's obvious concern was, first of all, not goodness but pleasure. There, with no need of apology or fear of puzzled reproof, one delighted in beauty; there, one's eager, hungry senses could be satisfied with the delicacies of sound, the pulsating exuberance of color; there, one could safely and with complete freedom of conscience give oneself up to delightful sleepless hours of excited remembrance, which, our growing adolescence soon told us, must have followed close upon the retreating heels of the Spanish cavalier.

"But dancing is wrong, Grandmother. You tell us so yourself."

"It is wrong, children. There is no question about that. It is *very* wrong here — but not in Cadiz."

"And drinking wine. Remember the Golden Text you made us say, 'Look thou not upon the wine when it is red.' "

At our words and those of the maker of Proverbs a puzzled zeal crept into her eyes,

and, tightening the soft curves of her face, reigned at length triumphant.

"It is wrong, *very* wrong. Not for a moment, children, would I have you believe differently. But not in Cadiz. Things are different there."

Beneficent, careless city, *jocosæ Gades!* How manifold and gracious were thy gifts to our imaginations! How bountiful those perceptions, swift and delicate, which set aside for occasional bright moments the stern, high principles of Truth, and Right, and Duty! Who can be sure that Juvenal himself, though he scorned and berated thy dancing girls and tunnies in oil, did not on chill days above the Tiber think with desire of thy sunny streets, did not, even while he invited his friend Persicus in that most delightful of satires to partake with him of eggs "from nests of twisted straw," feel a twitching of his nostrils at the thought of thy savory fish and sauces? In the long succession of his abstemious, high-thinking days, certain hours must have escaped his grasp and teased him to quick pursuit — hours given over like Grandmother's and our own to satisfying images of warmth and plenty, the riot of blossoms, the quick feet of

dancing-girls, the low laughter, the falling water of gardens white with moonlight, the perfumed winds from vineyards. Images such as these perchance lured Martial to accept the purse of Pliny the Younger and return after thirty-four years of Roman life with its "smart insincerities" to his Spanish village of Bilbilis, to his friends in Gades, and to Marcella, his patroness, who gave him an estate, and whose manners, he assures us, equalled those of any Roman matron! And such in very truth must have been the images which Cynthia's eyes and mine more than once detected passing in brilliant procession across the pages of Grandmother's open Bible as she meditated on Sunday mornings upon the sins of the world, the flesh, and the devil, indescribably abhorrent in all places — except Cadiz!

IV

It was surely meet and right as the years, past and present, dimmed for Grandmother, as images and experiences became shadowy forms only now and again emerging from the quiet harmony of succeeding hours, that

Cadiz alone should survive. There it stayed, far down in the very bottom of her mind, as white and shining as it had ever been. Her great love of books faded until it was lost in that host of ministering thoughts, which, all uncomprehended, nurture and sustain our frail wisdom; no longer did she smile tearful smiles over hosts of Dickens' people; no longer did she laugh her perennial laugh over Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine and "black stockings for sharks." Her delightful pride in prophesying the weather by swift and mysterious passages above her head of her left hand previously dipped in water was entirely forgotten. Even her stern and tenacious love of God was returned to Him to be softened and harmonized and made ready for her.

But Cadiz, symbol of her half guilty delight in the gay and the beautiful, which her rigorous childhood on a Maine upland farm had denied her — Cadiz remained. The red liquid in her medicine glass reminded her of its rosy wine, its gardens, its vineyards, terraced and fruit laden; the crowing laughter of her great-grand-daughter recalled tambourines and dainty, flying feet; the lilacs from her doorway brought quavering recitals

of fields of roses and oleanders and magnolias; the chance sight from her window of an incoming fishing schooner unfolded again before her eyes and ours the panorama of blue sky and sea and of glistening whiteness which was Cadiz.

She lay at last, after ninety years of rich and varied life, in her coffin, below the picture of the *Judith Blair*, painted off Hatteras in a spanking breeze. She was in her taffeta, still faintly perfumed. Cynthia and I, then in our twenties, stole in to see her, the usual stupid tears in my eyes, a shining in Cynthia's. About Grandmother's still lips a smile lingered, delicate, unmistakable.

"She's not with God," whispered Cynthia to me. "She couldn't smile like that with Him! She's gone back to Cadiz for a bit before she goes to Heaven!"

V

Cynthia and I have never seen Cadiz. We shall never see it, never subject those quivering lines of silver reaching heavenward from the white spires of its cathedral to the hard, unyielding light of actuality. But though no

eyes save our own read these words, we have at least stilled our uneasy consciences, which demanded that we record the national debt to that white and joyous city in other terms than those of the Mexican situation and the Spanish omelet!

HAVE YOU *MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT?*"

"HAVE YOU *MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT?*"

No, not this time in your library, in those tall old green books, ten by twelve, with bifurcated pages and Cruikshank illustrations! But in your hand. For in mine are three other cards marked respectively *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and each, like your own (if you have it), surmounted by a rugged, kindly face, the beard flowing and silky, the forehead lined, the hair thinning. I want *Martin Chuzzlewit* to complete my "book." Once he is mine, and the four cards laid aside, I am given another "turn" to ask for *Snowbound*, with its bald and patriarchal creator, or *Sartor Resartus*, its name strange and alluring, or *The Newcomes*, or perchance only for *Evangeline*, whose familiar title I pronounce with some scorn as not having the charm of the new and mysterious, and whose meticulous and benevolent author I accept on terms of good-natured tolerance.

"Have you *King Lear?*" "Have you *The Mill on the Floss?*" "Have you *The Fair Maid*

of Perth?" These were the celestial questions asked twenty years ago in half the sitting-rooms of the country. For the game of Authors was a national institution. Few children reached the age of ten without having found it in their Christmas stockings or beside their birthday plates. It supplemented the so-called education of the schools in a manner at once difficult to gauge and well-nigh impossible to overestimate. It stamped upon our careless minds, intent, first of all, on completing our "books" and winning the game, the names of great pieces of literature; it stored up in our memories ineradicable pictures of great men and women — George Eliot with her brooch and her parted hair, the genial and wry smile of Oliver Wendell Holmes, the massive, sad face of Carlyle, the wrinkled waistcoat of Sir Walter; it ensured us against a sense of embarrassed incompetence when we were later to roam among library shelves. Even those children to whom reading was not to become a passion, whose literary knowledge doubtless never progressed beyond those pieces of cardboard, must have retained at least a refining acquaintance with names, titles, and faces; and as for that goodly number of us to whom books

have proved better companions than persons, we owe to that evening game around the sitting-room table the obligation and the desire to seek out that aristocracy of letters and to make our own its long and beneficent effects.

One hopes, a little wistfully, that the game was in truth more than just a pastime; that it reflected, to some small extent at least, the tenor of an age before education had become a fad and "wide reading" an open sesame to social and pseudo-intellectual circles. And yet the claim must rest on a less secure footing than that identical one which is unhesitatingly made in these latter days for the prevalence of electric trains, toy monoplanes, and those various and terrifying means of locomotion which scoot and spin along our sidewalks. Doubtless, however, all idealism aside, the game was simply a means of entertainment, designed by certain clever persons for their own ends and neither reflecting an age nor intended for the better living of the younger generation.

And yet, whatever its origin, its end justified both ways and means. There was more than a request in "Have you *Henry Esmond?*" There was a foretaste, a prophecy, of the day when we ourselves should see Beatrix descend-

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ing the stairs and the Marchioness of Castlewood holding her own against the soldiers of the king. In the familiar bandying about of such names there was the graciousness of good company, and in our love for the cards themselves there was the suggestion of hero worship not to be despised.

I remember the reign of terror which swept our family circle upon the discovery, one snowy afternoon, that the baby had chewed *The French Revolution* into an unseemly pulp. The red scrollwork of the back was liquefied and running down his chin; the face of Carlyle was quite obliterated, "spit upon," in very truth. This tragedy was rivaled a few days later by the complete extinction in the open fire of *The Idylls of the King*. Both losses were made good by my brother John, who constructed from pasteboard two substitute cards. Upon these he placed not only the lists of productions, but also representations of Carlyle and Tennyson, which he enhanced, somewhat to our consternation, by inserting generous pipes between their lips. And yet, recalling those smoky colloquies by the kitchen fire at 5 Cheyne Row, what could have been more fitting?

It was gratitude for such recollections as these which sent me in the last Christmas season to purchase a copy of the old game for my nephews and nieces. I found it with surprisingly little difficulty, and to my rejoicing comment that it must be still in good repute the saleslady rejoined that she sold a most satisfying number each year. Reassured and somewhat chagrined at my lack of faith, I began, while waiting for my parcel, to turn the cards of a duplicate box before me. I paused at the first to make a foolish wish. I hoped it might be my luck to find upon its face the thinning hair of Dickens and that title which had opened the door for me to Mr. Pecksniff and Sairey Gamp. In my fear of turning the card I was frankly sentimental. When I summoned courage to do so, I was confronted by the placid and assured smile of a lady whose face was new and portentous in spite of its benign goodwill. Beneath I read:

GENE STRATTON PORTER

A GIRL OF THE LIMBERLOST

Freckles

The Harvester

The Keeper of the Bees

My wish denied, my citadel in ruins, what was there to do but continue my inspection? What but to know the worst?

When, five minutes later, I left the counter, I was beleaguered by emotions so painful that the simple wrath of the saleslady at the return of my package and request for my money was as balm and ointment upon a troubled spirit. Descending thus into an Avernus of anger and disgust, disillusionment and irony, I was neither stayed nor comforted by the ill-timed remembrance of a recent article, entitled "The Hygiene of Reading," which had found its way to my table. Its author, one of our leading professional "educators," therein warns all teachers and mothers against a pernicious malady which he is pleased to call "a premature reverence for great books," and which, he says, not infrequently sadly infects the young child. Perhaps some disciple of his had compiled this new and revised edition of the game of Authors as an antidote or anti-toxin!

With most of the other shoppers I hurried into the toy department. I inspected miniature pile drivers, steam shovels, and self-starting trucks. Here at least, I told myself, was no

pretense. By shopping here I could at all events secure myself against hearing on Christmas night, above the carols over the radio, my nephews and nieces calling:

"Have you *The Little Colonel?*" "Have you *Freckles?*" "Have you *Pollyanna?*" "Have you *Riders of the Purple Sage?*"

WORMWOOD — FOR THOUGHTS

WORMWOOD — FOR THOUGHTS

I

"O, *Mickle* is the powerful grace that lies
In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities."

THUS soliloquized Friar Laurence on that "gray-eyed morn" in fair Verona as he bore his laden osier cage from the Franciscan garden into his own cell, there to hear the "riddling confession" of the distraught young Romeo; and thus in homelier drift said my great-aunt Mary Ann Fawcett, once herbalist of Piscataquis County, Maine.

Piscataquis is alike an inland and an upland county. A hundred miles from the coast the tall fir trees of its high pastures harbor few mists; the air above them on summer days is dry and pungent. It is a county of ponds and lakes; Moosehead cuts its western boundary with miles of dark and curving shore line; the smaller contribute their brooks and trout streams to the headwaters of the Penobscot and the Kennebec. The hills, though none other emulates Katahdin to the northeast, are yet

ample, and in places tumble about in wide, well-wooded stretches of country. In the high valleys among them the farms embrace a variety of land, so that within a small acreage the plaintive whistle of the whitethroat at noon from a secluded pine thicket may be echoed and supplemented by the hoarse quavering of blackbirds from the marshes and by the rapturous trill of a song sparrow from the top of the tallest mullein stalk in some bare and open pasture. Here the dog days of August are less to be reckoned with than on the coast, here the weather is less capricious; here the summer winds, warm from blowing across the sunny shoulders of the hills, are perfumed by aromatic odors strongly at variance with the salt and the moisture of those farther south.

Such a wind, blowing one August morning more than a century ago across the bayberry and pennyroyal, the juniper and wild marjoram, on the slopes of a Piscataquis farm, must have given rise to the rumor, since become a tradition, that my great-aunt Mary Ann's first and immediate act upon entering this world was to sniff. She herself for seventy years stoutly denied the accusation, although

upon occasion she was known to amend her denial by the announcement that *if* her nose twitched, it did so merely in contemptuous prophecy. For she was followed, within the short space of an hour, not by one sister, but by two!

Triplets were an innovation in the Fawcett family, unheralded by precedent. They were an innovation, too, among the older families of northern Piscataquis. Those immediately concerned felt, a trifle uncomfortably, the necessity of exoneration, and took an easier refuge than is possible to-day within the ramparts of those purposes of God which are past finding out. Like Milton and Pope, they sought, if not to justify, at least to vindicate His ways. Then, having nominally cast the responsibility for the situation upon Him, they exhausted the wardrobe at hand in dressing the three babies, who were lusty and identical, and summoned the female portion of the neighborhood to come and sew.

As time went on, however, all traces of embarrassment were blotted out in the complete assurance of the working of Divine Providence. Such infants, without spot or blemish, like those creatures commanded by the Levit-

ican law, were obviously, in spite of their sex, reserved for a high destiny. That initial dismay, not untouched by chagrin, had been unbecoming in a family which was contributing to the new State of Maine — but lately separated from Massachusetts, its mother — sea captains and Congregational ministers as well as self-respecting farmers. Accordingly the great-uncle of the triplets was summoned from Boston for the christening at six months. With a solemnity fraught with mystery, he named them, in order of their birth, Mary Ann, Martha Ann, and Sarah Ann, amid the awe of the country congregation, who, whatever their purpose in attending the ceremony, were deeply impressed by the atmosphere engendered thereat and, like the inhabitants of Sweet Auburn, "remained to pray."

And yet the fulfillment of spectacular destinies by girls one hundred years ago was wellnigh impossible, even with the complete cooperation of Providence. The sisters in due time approached young womanhood without having startled their neighborhood, not to mention the outside world, by any accomplishments save their intense devotion to one another, their industry, virtue, and come-

liness. This last-named grace, however, must have been outstanding, if we can trust the sentiments in their Keepsake Album, now in my possession. In August 1840, which year marked their eighteenth birthday, they are likened by one fervid young gentleman of a classic turn to the Three Graces, and by another — a cousin who, having vainly wooed Sarah Ann, apparently suspected her sisters of treachery and connivance — to the Three Fates. The minister of the parish found them in that year strongly reminiscent of Jemima, Kezia, and Keren-happuch, for he writes, with due respect to his source, "And in all the land were no women found so fair. — Job 42. 15."

Up to this time they were, according to their own later testimony, as identical as the proverbial peas in a pod. A divergence in occupation and environment, however, which followed close upon their nineteenth anniversary, produced inevitable results. Sarah Ann at length rewarded the tenacity of her cynical young cousin, John Fawcett, and moved with him to a neighboring hill farm. Martha Ann, who, it had been tacitly agreed, possessed a certain more delicate refinement of manner than her sisters, — a "tone," so to speak, — was

sent, upon the request of her great-uncle, to Cambridge, there to preside over his wifeless home, to move about the "Harvard circle" with decorum, and to find in that larger, more fertile field meet soil for the nurture of her many graces. And Mary Ann, left with her parents, entered upon that predestined career of sniffing which made her a godsend to two generations of country doctors, a solace to a wide countryside, and an ultimate source of wisdom and of humor to her grandniece.

II

Our paths crossed at precisely the turn of the present century. In that first year of the nineteen hundreds I was sent, an overgrown, awkward girl of thirteen, from our coast village for a summer in Piscataquis. It was the opinion of my father, ably seconded by our country doctor, that a bronchial cough, irritated by the mists of Penobscot Bay, would be almost at once dispelled by the dry, bracing air of inland fields and pastures. I recall the journey north from Bangor in the stuffy, loitering day train. It was the first I had ever taken alone. I sat leaning forward on the red

plush seat and suffering from an annoying prickly sensation which I laid to my blue serge dress and to the asafœtida bag fastened about my neck at the last minute by a cautious grandmother, but which was probably the fruit of an extreme nervousness. It rained, I remember, in the course of the afternoon, a few great drops from a single sullen cloud high in the heavens, and I became anxious as to my leghorn hat trimmed with blue forget-me-nots and bows of tulle. I remember, too, the June fields, gold and white with buttercups and daisies, the drowsy buzz of sawmills beside rushing, foaming streams, the thrill engendered by seeing in the flesh, as it were, towns and villages whose names I had long read in the weekly paper — Dover and Foxcroft, Abbot Village, Guilford, Sangerville.

I was met at sundown by the distraught young cynic of my Keepsake Album, John Fawcett, now, sixty years later, an old gentleman of nearly eighty, who drove me in a kindly silence six miles through the hills and brought me just at nightfall to the farmhouse. He and my great-aunt Sarah Ann, he said, were on the verge of celebrating their sixtieth anniversary of married life. He told me he had

been singularly blessed, and I believed him, though I have since wondered more than once whether he did not perhaps mean to emphasize the singularity of his existence rather than the blessedneess thereof. For with him lived not only his wife but her two sisters as well, neither of whom had married!

Familiar as they had been in family lore, I had not heretofore seen my great-aunts, and even at thirteen I felt the extremely unique character of the situation. Triplets of seventy-eight are not met with on every summer's day! They still retained the fetish of dressing alike and wore simple gowns of gray percale with white and hemstitched aprons. As I saw them gathered in the wide doorway of the old house, I felt a sudden fear mounting for the moment almost into panic at the sudden apprehension of their collective years and of my own thin little life.

But such a fear was, naturally enough, put to rout by the necessity of greeting them and delivering the family messages and by the curiosity they involuntarily engendered. Identical though they may have been at eighteen, sixty years of diversity in environment, in occupation, and in thought had wrought many

differences. They were of the same height, though Sarah Ann seemed flattened into stoutness and Martha Ann attenuated into extreme thinness. They had the same white hair parted in the middle, though Sarah Ann's was streaked with yellow, whereas Martha Ann's hinted at curl papers, and Mary Ann's was pulled peremptorily into a very firm and somewhat arrogant knot at the back of her head. They had the same blue eyes, but in Sarah Ann's placidity triumphed, in Martha Ann's restlessness, in Mary Ann's prophetic insight. Sarah Ann's nose was strongly pragmatic; Martha Ann's delicate and a trifle disdainful; Mary Ann's eager like a pointer's. Aunt Sarah Ann inquired with real concern if I was not hungry; Aunt Martha Ann, in a tone redolent of literary circles, asked if I had read Dickens *in toto;* Aunt Mary Ann, whose quick nose smelled my asafœtida bag, threw queries to the winds and gave vent to astonishment, not unmixed with anger, that my cough had not been thoroughly dosed with anise and horehound mixed with just a trace of powdered flagroot. I answered Aunt Sarah Ann by eating a substantial supper of beans and brown bread, and Aunt Martha Ann by attempting

to decide then and there my predilection for *Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield*. I did not answer my Aunt Mary Ann at all. Her assertion had been of too oracular a nature to make a reply at that moment seem either meet or right.

That night she threw my bedraggled asafœtida bag out of my bedroom window with a fine gesture of disgust. Then with her firm hands, so amazingly free from the humps and knotted veins of age, she smoothed my lavendered sheets and placed between my two great pillows a tiny one filled with dried hops and leaves of bayberry. A hop pillow, she confided to me as she blew out my candle and stood, a tall, straight figure in the soft summer darkness, had proved the best of sedatives to King George the Third during those trying nights immediately following the Declaration of Independence. It was just as sure a preventative against homesickness. She left me to suck a square of her famous anise and horehound cough remedy, to watch for some drowsy moments the moon swing high over the tumbling Piscataquis hills, and then, like the restive George the Third, to bury my nose in hops and go at once to sleep.

III

By quick degrees Aunt Sarah Ann and Aunt Martha Ann faded from the immediate daily round of my thoughts and experiences — the one with her quiet, grave concern over my appetite, the rents in my ginghams, the nip in my leg from the querulous old gander; the other with her frail, correct table manners, her punctilious attention to suffixes, and her wistful ancedotes of Mr. Longfellow "in his younger days." The manner of their fading was borne in upon me a dozen years afterward when on a warm summer night in Berlin I attended a performance of *Tannhäuser* in the Tiergarten. Between the acts I strolled with other eager, curious students about the dark, shadowy walks, closely bordered by evergreens and lindens, whose perfume, drifting through the quiet air, had seemingly taken unto itself the rhythm and the stillness alike of that magical night.

One long and narrow avenue, I remember, was only obscurely lit by a lamp at either end, but as we traversed its dim centre there came from above our heads a sudden jarring sound, followed by a great white burst of light. For

an instant there was something almost terrifying in that quick illumination from the bigger lamp, something awestruck in the shimmering of the poplars and in the pale, inadequate gleaming of the smaller lights. And there sprang into my mind the thought of my great-aunt Mary Ann, of whose death at ninety I had only recently heard. To me at thirteen she had been like that great central lamp, overpowering the other lights by the fierce irradiation of her prodigal self.

I served, however, a novitiate of some weeks before I was allowed within even the outer circle of its glow. July warmed the hills, bringing added gloss to the bayberry in the pastures, thickening the clumps of yellow melilot along dusty roadsides, purpling the pennyroyal on the high, dry shoulders of the fields. Not a fair morning passed, even Monday with its rite of washing, that Aunt Mary Ann did not set out on her mysterious journeyings. From a corner of the wide back porch I looked up from the beans I was stringing. How could she fail to sense the pleas I was sending toward her? For days I loitered among the morning-glories by the roadside gate. She passed through unheeding, her empty basket with its

scissors, newspapers, and ball of twine in one hand, the strings of her capacious blue apron tied in an extra knot at the front of her square, high waist. Did she, I have since wondered, in planning the ordeal to which she subjected me, have all the time in view the ascertaining of my spiritual fitness as a companion as well as the attainment of my physical well-being? I am inclined to think she did. Æsculapius, it will be recalled, living for long years the life of a solitary wanderer among the wild places of Thessaly and Argolis in search of healing leaves and berries, was slow to permit a disciple!

The ordeal was undergone after this manner. One morning in mid-July I descended to the great kitchen to find laid out for me on the table in the recessed corner my usual substantial breakfast. I found also my aunt Mary Ann, equipped and dressed for excursioning, but loitering a bit restively about the stove whereon stood a yellow bowl of generous proportions. A dark liquid, upon whose surface floated leaf and stick fragments, filled it to the brim. She halted my passage to the table more by the atmosphere she was creating than by her suddenly uplifted hand.

"Before you eat your breakfast," she said, looking sternly away from me, "I want you to drink this. To-morrow there'll be something else, and every morning. Don't ask what it is. It won't hurt you."

I downed the liquid, drinking it directly from the bowl and avoiding the extraneous matter as best I could. It was more dreadful than anything I had ever swallowed during a childhood spent in a family adept at dosing. Its bitterness ran away from itself and, traveling to my nose and eyes, made me grope for my pocket handkerchief. But still I drank. My stomach rebelled, but in one swift and desperate instant I commanded it to keep its place. My outraged tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, but I forced it downward to receive more mouthfuls and yet more. I would have drunk hemlock without a word, for in her presence there in that old kitchen I somehow sensed that there was more at stake for me than the well-being of my liver and my stomach. She seized the bowl just when my flesh was crying out for release.

Yet a week passed without recognition or reward. Every morning there was the same yellow bowl on the back of the stove filled with

some concoction which differed from its predecessors only in its degree of bitterness. Was there no herb of all those which, the Bible told me, God had made to grow "for the service of man" of a sweet savor? And what about this dinner of them extolled in Proverbs which with love is better "than a stalled ox and hatred therewith"? I was frankly skeptical and yet tenacious. And every morning Aunt Mary Ann departed alone for the fields and hills, leaving the bitterness of my disappointment to struggle for supremacy with that of the mysterious herb of the day, which, I fancied, I could feel coursing triumphantly through my veins and arteries.

But with the swift passing of that week, with its seven apocalyptical days, there came a change. On the eighth morning there was no yellow bowl on the back of the stove. I stopped hesitatingly on my way to the breakfast table. Through the open door of the pantry beyond I caught sight of the bowl on a shelf. There was no mistaking it. Still hesitant, I sat down at my place. Was this treatment, perhaps, of the concentrative sort, seven mornings and skip seven, like that magic three-day formula for sulphur and molasses?

And then from the porch came my aunt Mary Ann's voice, crisp, decisive, as though she had made up her mind once and for all.

"I was just thinking, as it's an extra good day, that perhaps — But there — probably you've other things to do!"

I stumbled in my reply, realizing perhaps for the first time in my life the utter inadequacy of words. A tingling assailed my back. My breakfast became suddenly intolerable to me.

Ten minutes later I was crossing with her the fields beyond the roadside. We were making for some sandy slopes on the hills. I walked by her side, subdued and silent. I felt as young John Mark must have felt after he had become "profitable" to Saint Paul, he who had heretofore been scorned by the apostle as useless and unnecessary. To comment or to question I did not once presume. I simply tried to keep in step with the long strides of her generous feet as she traversed the fields and scaled the uplands. The day was one of those bright New England days, less rare inland than on the coast, when the brilliant air seems pierced with countless shafts of light like great thin plates of burnished steel. On such a day, twigs

and branches, even leaves and flowers, seem outlined in light instead of imperceptibly merging into it. And still the air was not hot, but cool, hard, and thin.

I first saw my aunt sniff as we reached the lowest of the sandy slopes. It was not an audible motion; only her nostrils dilated, her eyes widened, and her upper lip twitched ever so slightly. But it was an unmistakable sniff. When she did it, she was standing erect, looking off at the green and tumbling country. She too seemed outlined by light. And after she had done it she left me and made directly for some clumps of ragged-leaved weeds, which grew in great profusion in the sand. I was conscious of no odor from them, and surely they were entirely visible. The sniff, then, predetermined nothing; it was entirely accessory, of no practical value whatsoever.

I watched her pull a great quantity of these and store them in her apron before I went to help her. The bruised leaves and stalks gave forth an acrid, penetrating smell. This was wormwood, she told me. I had drunk much in the past week. It was the herb of herbs. No one knew how long it had served mankind. As I doubtless knew, it was mentioned more than

once in the Bible; in the Book of Revelation a falling star was named for it. Pliny, the Roman, had mentioned it centuries ago, and the American Indians without it would have died out as a race. Though not yet in flower, it was good for certain ailments demanding the properties of the younger leaves and stalks. She did not name these ailments. She shared in that singular mystery which ever belongs to the hierarchy of those who heal.

Higher up on the bare hill slopes the mullein rose, straight and tall, in these late July days just bursting into yellow flower. As we gathered the thick, hairy, heavily ribbed leaves, she gave me its more gracious names. She herself, she said, preferred "Peter's staff" or "high-taper," though the country folks about clung to "old-man's-flannel" and "shepherd's-club." It too was of great age. It was hardy enough to have weathered the Flood, and she had heard once that Pocahontas, combining it with wild mustard, had made with signal success a poultice for Captain John Smith! "High-taper" stayed longest in my mind and still sings there on August days when the tall stalks in our pastures are alight with pale yellow flames.

In the lower fields that day we found the wild marjoram, with its clusters of purplish flowers, and near by the pennyroyal, aromatic enough to induce sniffing from us both. I followed my aunt's example in chewing one of its sturdy, slender stems, though its soft hairs tickled my throat. There too grew masses of yarrow, which we gathered in great quantities, and which, she unbent enough to tell me, was excellent for hemorrhages. In a swampy place between two ridges we found the purple boneset or joe-pye weed. Over this, which was just in bud, she studied at some length, testing the leaves by holding them to the light, by crushing and smelling them. Her silence increased the mystery which clung about her every action. Years afterward, reading of Theophrastus testing the plants in his Athenian garden, I saw again in a quick flash my aunt Mary Ann's intent face, bending over the lance-shaped leaves of boneset in her thin, long-fingered hands.

IV

From that beneficent July morning to the September day when, brown, coughless, and

reluctant, I left the Piscataquis hills for the coast and school, I was my great-aunt's disciple, she my Æsculapius. The joe-pye weed in the swamps purpled and then browned in great, furry clumps; the chamomile by the roadside faded, its white petals, bent backward in the August heat, giving it the expression of petulant children; the sharp odor of the pennyroyal softened on the high pastures. Every fair morning found us in the fields or woods or on the slopes, sniffing, cutting, pulling, while the wind blew clear and strong from the northwest, or the bright August heat shimmered over the uplands, or a soft dull day brought out the purple tints of the distant hills.

On rainy mornings my great-aunt went to the large unfinished chamber beneath the ell roof where for fifty years she had crushed and strained, brewed and bottled, and where she kept her small store of precious books. One August day, with some evident reluctance she asked me in with her. At this moment I can smell the dry, acrid odor of the big bare room, see the muffled bundles hanging in yellowed paper from the rafters, hear the simmering of some recondite liquid brewing on the air-tight

wood stove. On the window sills were ranged certain enigmatical jars and bottles containing fluids of various colors, which, after being subjected to the light for certain varying seasons, were to be put away for future use.

Her dearest possession, she confided to me one stormy day, was a collection of books in six volumes. This work bore the title of *American Medicinal Plants*. I have since found that it was written by one Charles F. Millspaugh and published in 1887. Without it, she told me, Piscataquis County would be a sorry place. The books had colored plates in great profusion, which had a way of brightening the most fog-swept afternoon. The text seemed stupid and rather unintelligible until one day I made the discovery that Dr. Millspaugh seemed to have one never-varying prescription for the brewing of herbs. Again and again as I turned the pages I found the identical direction, until I became convinced that no herb juices could be efficacious unless they were allowed to "stay for eight days in a dark, cool place." These were his words, sounding over and over again like a refrain. They have stayed in my mind and imagination ever since that day.

Yet in spite of the fascination of the herb

room, which was in use too early to be known as either a studio or a laboratory, it could not compete with the daily excursions in the open. The climax or high moment of all of these, just as the high moment indoors soon came to lie in Dr. Millspaugh's ever-recurring phrase, occurred just before we left with our spoils for home. Then, the sun warning us of noon, we stopped in some clear, high spot to spread our harvest upon the ground, to sort, discard, and rearrange. I recall a certain green ridge, bare of trees, which gave us, whenever we looked up from our work, a view of the white farmhouse in its uneven fields and of high, rock-strewn pastures, rising behind it to other ridges like our own. Here, on her knees, with newspapers spread out before her, my aunt Mary Ann sorted and displayed her wares to her eyes and mine. In such a position, before his carpet, did the herbalist of the Middle Ages kneel at Smithfield, or at St. Giles Fair in Winchester, famous for its gingerbread, or at the renowned Goose Fair in Nottingham. She might, indeed, have been reminiscent, to more learned minds than mine at thirteen, of the far-famed Madame Trote of Salerno, whom Rutebeuf, the French trouvère

of the thirteenth century, extols as the wisest lady in all the four quarters of the world in her knowledge of medicinal herbs.

But unlike her predecessors, who bore their universal panaceas from fair to village green and market place, attracting attention by bells and horns and cries and holding it by a flow of urgent and reassuring words, my aunt Mary Ann was given to silence and circumspection. If she commented at all upon her harvest, it was to call my attention to the twin heads of some flower, usually single, or to the eccentricities of a certain root. Most memorable, therefore, were her confidences which she lent to me on the last of our excursions, made the September morning just preceding the day of my leaving for home.

We had been out primarily for wormwood, now in great, ungainly masses of yellow, knobby blossoms. In waste places and along the ragged edges of the fields it grew to four feet in height. We had gathered armfuls of it and now were on our green ridge sorting it in bundles, which, she assured me with relief, contained enough to supply the most exorbitant demand during the coming winter. The bundles securely tied, I gathered together papers,

basket, and scissors against our leaving. But my aunt still sat on the ridge, her long, green-stained fingers, which always denied her age, interlaced about her knees.

"It's queer about wormwood," she said at last, to herself rather than to me. "From the reading I've done I'd say it's been used for thousands of years. It's in the ancients, you know — poets and historians tell about it as well as those that know about such things." (Oh, the mystery in her voice, enclosing in a charmed circle the healers of the world!)

There was more in that soliloquy that I would fain recapture but cannot, anecdotes of country cures brought about by the herb of herbs, legends connected with its use in far-off lands, pertinent advice as to its efficacy in the minor ailments that beset us. I recall instead the first touches of color in that quiet hill country, the red of the sumachs, the bronze of the hazel bushes. But that which she said as she rose to go I shall never forget, though the words may be my own in the sad place of her lovelier, more native speech.

"There are those that might laugh," she said, "at this next. But I've studied and seen, and I'm convinced in my own mind. Worm-

wood's not only for the body. It's for the mind as well. It makes thoughts, so to speak. I've seen it time and again. Taken right, it's bound to work. I've known it to cure broken hearts and to put life into them. But there are folks in this world who'd claim I was plain crazy to say such a thing!"

Urged by the imagined reaction of her neighbors, she emerged quickly from the charmed circle and prepared to go. She was brisk and practical all the way home, and that afternoon by her look and manner she excluded me from the herb room where she was crushing, straining, and bottling the freshly gathered wormwood. Obviously she had with grave lack of decorum lent me too much confidence and could atone for it only by forbidding my alien eyes to look upon the wormwood as she made it ready to "stay for eight days in a dark, cool place."

V

All this happened years ago; and one is painfully aware in these latter days of the name and the penalty attached in social and intellectual circles to one who is willfully remi-

niscent. Yet in this era of tonsillectomies and appendectomies, abscessed teeth and complete nervous breakdowns, when the most literary of magazines gives space to the insurmountable problem of paying the manifold costs of even legitimate illnesses and the health insurance companies flourish like the bay trees of the Psalmist, it is pleasing to recall that generous-footed Ophelia of Piscataquis County, who once contended that wormwood was for thoughts, and for whom, like Wordsworth's Peter Bell, the simple growth of Mother Earth sufficed.

It is also not unpleasing to contemplate what beneficence, now hidden and inaccessible, might perchance be ours if we would for a season drop the anxieties, academic, culinary, and economic, that beset us and "stay for eight days in a dark, cool place."

"MYSTICAL MATHEMATICKS"

"MYSTICAL MATHEMATICKS"

I FIRST became aware of "mystical mathematicks" in the garden of Saint Hilda's Convent. I use the verb advisedly. Years ago, when I met and straightway loved Sir Thomas Browne, I read in *The Garden of Cyrus* how pentagons were discernible in maple leaves and rhombuses in lilac buds and how remarkable in natûre is the number five. From some forgotten source I know, too, that Theophrastus demonstrated Euclid by means of stalks and veins of leaves, and that centuries later Albertus Magnus did the same as he paced his secluded cloister in Cologne. But knowing a thing is a very different matter from becoming aware of it, as everyone but the drabbest rationalist will readily grant.

The first is a definite process and the goal, once reached, is, for the time being at least, secure; the second is too disorderly to be termed a process and its goal is obscured in a haze of impressions. To accomplish the first one must seize upon and hold fast the thing to be learned; to become possessed of the sec-

ond one has but to yield oneself, careless of the result, to whatever influence be abroad. The possession of knowledge may be secure and comforting like the tenets of an unshakable creed, or coherent and cruel like a rare dream of one loved and long since dead. Yet awareness in its slow and almost imperceptible conquest of the mind and the imagination is at once a thousandfold more comforting or more cruel.

But to return to Saint Hilda's, where I have been more than once a guest and a sojourner. In the comeliness of that retreat one notes with slow surprise how things long known become intimate and necessary or slip away as useless and intrusive. This growing awareness seems, indeed, to one who loves the place as much a feature of it as pigeons are a feature of Saint Mark's or as rooks, circling through long, slow English twilights about its gray and ruined arches, are a feature of the old nunnery at Godstowe on the Thames.

And yet an attempt to trace such an impression to its source is baffling and unsatisfying. Does it perchance have its birth in the well-ordered convent days which clarify by their insistence upon the essentials of work and

worship? Or in the very fact that here life is shorn of accessories and that space is therefore left for intimate and necessary knowledge and perception? Socrates, one recalls, defines a man clear of non-essentials as most nearly approaching the Godhead. Or is there a clue to it in the coöperative labor of each and all for the common welfare, in which Saint Benedict himself discerned such inestimable good? Which query leads us back to the garden and to the "mystical mathematicks" of Sister Irenaeus and of Plato.

Sister Irenaeus is the gardener of Saint Hilda's. One surmises that a century hence she will be the patron saint of that plot of rather unpromising soil which she has made to bring forth and blossom. For, her own day being over and mayhap a less tenacious successor in charge, one imagines her restless and anxious spirit performing miracles on summer nights in sheer exasperation and self-defense! She has the indomitable energy of Lamb's Mrs. Battle, though softened and humanized by the more refining character of her lovelier occupation.

Early meditation, Mass and breakfast being over, she leaves the cloister for the lawn,

her hurrying feet imprinting the dew-laden grass with quick, decisive marks of darker green as she makes for the little avenue of poplar trees which gives access to her domain. A hundred times I have seen her pause upon the first of the flag-stones between the first of the poplars. To the outward eye she is looking at the meadows which slope to the great river and on the other side rise again to wooded bluffs, or at the wide, free spaces of sky which never fail to impress the beholder as unreal, or at the reflection of the chapel tower in the tiny lake. But in reality I believe that, like Saint Rose of Lima in her own garden, her feet are inevitably stayed at the entrance to her earthly paradise by a sweeping sense of the abundant mercies of God.

Once within the garden she begins to render concrete thanks for her benefits. Seldom is gratitude so prodigal. It takes her but a moment in the little green-house to divest herself of the tight undersleeves of her habit, to change her fresh guimpe for one already soiled, to tie about her waist her big black apron. She gives her heavy rubbers several smart whacks against the cement floor, not, obviously, to assure herself that they are on,

but perhaps merely to give the signal for the release of her energy. Then she seizes her tools and makes for the borders to wage a morning's warfare against cutworms, to transplant snapdragons, or to tie up foxgloves recalcitrant after a night's windy rain.

She works with a fine, rhythmic zest. Cultivating, she goes down and up the borders, drawing her fork in a zigzag fashion in and out among the plants, never too close, never too far away for the best results. The wide skirts of her habit sway in unison with the motion of her body. Transplanting, she kneels, plants, and rises as though she were keeping time to some rhythmic undertone of the earth.

By the other nuns she is regarded as somewhat remote, even inaccessible. Perhaps they dread her scorn of their ignorance of regal delphiniums and love-in-a-mist, her ill-concealed impatience at their acceptance of a garden as a matter of course. I myself, having been captivated by the foxgloves during her hours of meditation, and homesick for my own garden tools, determined early in the summer upon rash measures. She found me one morning after Mass with a dozen cutworms, disemboweled from the lupine roots,

to my credit, and she accepted me without a word.

Thereafter we worked together. I hope by my industry I justified in her eyes my heretofore idle existence. By degrees, at all events, we came to share the daily romances of the gardener — the successful transplanting of unlikely seedlings, the high mortality of insects, the new flowerings of every night. We arrived at length at colloquies. With what blooms should we honour Saint Joseph on the coming Wednesday? Would larkspurs of a purple shade mar the blue harmony on the altar of the Blessed Virgin? In mid-morning there came from the convent kitchen cold milk with crackers, and, regardless of grimy hands, we ate and drank in the shadow of the hedge. There I told Sister Irenaeus of the riotous garden at Sonning Lock on the Thames which has taken prizes among all the lock gardens, of the cedars of Lebanon which of themselves make a garden in the cloister close of Salisbury, and of a German garden I once knew whose beds of pink geraniums and purple heliotrope matched a pink house with purple shutters. She liked as little as Bacon the picture of formal English gardens whose hedges

are clipped in grotesque figures, but she never tired of a certain secluded garden in Devonshire whose bronze wallflowers clamber down the stern face of the cliff to meet the incoming tide.

In August twilights between supper and the call to night prayers we paced the walks, following their gentle decline toward the western leas; for Saint Hilda's garden is like that preferred by Sir William Temple, "an oblong upon a descent." Now, all clean and respectable, we could enjoy the fruits of our energy and labor. It was on one of these evenings, while the white lupines were pale ghosts of themselves in the dusk, that Sister Irenaeus told me of the eternal geometrizing of God. It was Plato's doctrine, she said, and her own, just as it must belong to all true gardeners and all true mathematicians. It was evident beyond the shadow of a doubt — in the concentric circles of the summer chrysanthemum, in the spirals of the Queen Anne's lace, in the axes of symmetry apparent in the leaves of elder and of ash.

When I left Saint Hilda's to return to a world less sensitive to "mystical mathematicks," I carried with me as Sister Irenaeus's

gift a leaf of elder which she had waxed and mounted on white paper and which was supplemented by a proposition in geometry, expounded by means of mysterious letters and symbols. My unmathematical mind neither knows nor is aware of its meaning in geometrical terms, but it serves to bring back again that beneficence of Saint Hilda's which I have tried to suggest in these stupid and inadequate words. Mathematics more mystical even than those apprehended by Sister Irenaeus and by Plato may be its Cause — who shall say? — but certain it is that the impression and the influence remain, alike as unmistakable and as intangible as air. There old knowledge brightens slowly into new; there the actuality of old truths is once more held fast and cherished — while the shadows of the poplars on the high lawns march and retreat and the notes of the chapel bells, sent hourly all day out over the wide meadows, come stealing back in darkness to the still tower of Our Lady of Victory.

A KITCHEN PARNASSUS

A KITCHEN PARNASSUS

HENRY ADAMS was, in at least one respect, less fortunate than my sister Cynthia. At three years old he first became aware of sunlight on a yellow kitchen floor; but he was sitting in that sunlight, whereas she, at the same age, saw its broad, dazzling shaft from the top of our old secretary, I saw it, too, and from the same vantage ground; but it was not with me, as in the case of Henry Adams and of Cynthia, my first sense impression. I was five. Already I had known the drowsy scent of red peonies in a hot corner of the garden, the friendly smell of cool apples. Taste I knew, too — the puckery, restraining taste of forbidden chokecherries, the taste of sulphur and molasses, lingering and powdery long after it should have gone. And the yellow of a floor was to me never so yellow as a great ball of dandelions which my father had once made for me and which he rolled to and fro, hither and yon, across the clipped green grass. I always used to imagine that the sun-

light on our kitchen floor had somehow got into Cyntha's eyes — she used to gaze at it so steadily from the top of the secretary. My own eyes never shone like that. I too early forgot the glories of "that imperial palace" whence I came.

Of course, it might have been different with me had my mother thought two years earlier of the old secretary; but she did not. That inspiration was coincident in family history with the unexpected marriage of our one servant, already at middle age, to an exacting fisherman, the arrival of a new baby, and an especially bitter winter. My mother, beset by accident and Fate, and yoked, however happily, with a husband manually ineffective, had need of inspiration. She always said in after years that the idea came to her in the middle of a winter night when, fearful lest her bread was not rising as it should, she had come downstairs to replenish the kitchen fire. Then and there, as the dying embers caught the dry bark of a stick of birch and as thin, bright circles of light outlined themselves upon the black range, the thought of the old secretary leaped into my mother's mind and raced about there until she fairly laughed aloud in her quiet

kitchen. As she started upstairs, she gave a defiant little kick to the rug rolled tightly against the outside door to keep out the draughts of cold air. No more, she told herself, would coughs and croup slink across the kitchen floor to Cynthia and me playing there on cold winter mornings; and this, with all the rest, she told my father also, waking him out of a sound sleep to do so.

Accordingly, the next morning, before he left for his office, my father moved the secretary from its place in our shabby, overcrowded library to the west wall of the kitchen, just between the wide baking board and the cellar door. It was a huge piece of furniture, topped by two broad shelves, one just far enough below the other to serve as a convenient and comfortable foot rest. Between these shelves there were tiny drawers with glass knobs, and below the lower there were more drawers, so long and roomy as to make one think that the secretary was only a chest of them after all. But just between the second and third, if one touched the springs on either side of the polished edge, the green baize top of a desk began to come out, and lo! the secretary was complete. No one felt quite certain as to its

age. My mother could remember how, when she was a little girl, her grandfather had sat, cravatted and stern, by the desk part and read the Bible at family prayers.

The very novelty of my mother's idea made memorable our first morning on the secretary. It was a cold January day of high wind and bright sunlight, glaring against the deep snow of our driveway and orchard. The yellow painted floor of our great old kitchen was cut by broad bands of light on whose shining surfaces were reflected leaf and flower shadows from the plants on the window ledges. My father and mother lifted Cynthia and me, laughing and in high feather, to our places at either end of the wide top shelf and secured us firmly to the stout upright posts by roller towels, which, passed double under our arms, assured our perfect safety. Our feet rested comfortably on the shelf below, our knees at just the most perfect angle for the roomiest of laps; between us was an assortment of puzzles, picture books, and some old, orange-colored fashion magazines from which to cut paper dolls. After my father had done laughing at us, he kissed my mother twice instead of once. Then he left for the village through the snow-

blocked driveway, and she watched him quite out of sight.

That morning was but the first of a five years' tenure for me as winter resident of the old secretary, and yet the details of it are sketched indelibly upon my memory. Beyond the frost of the windows, and visible through the clear, uneven spaces at the top of the panes, stretched the snow-covered fields with the dark, delicate branches of trees above them; within the kitchen, the fragrant warmth of the bright air and the even singing of the fire; on the floor, the sunlight. My mother bathed the baby by the fire while we watched from our eminence, and carried him to his cradle in the library for his nap. Then she hurried about with her baking, for once free from children underfoot. It was not long before there was a downy patch of flour, like the frailest of snow crystals, upon her pink cheek, and as she worked she sang about a bright and shining river, by which sometime we were all to gather and which in some way became confused in my mind with the sunlight on the floor. When the great clock in the dining-room struck ten, she brought us fresh ginger cookies and some milk in our

new mugs, on which blue children in white sunbonnets gathered blue flowers in a white field.

Of our activities that morning I do not recall so much. The unusualness of the situation, perhaps, contented us with doing little. I suppose we cut dolls and worked at puzzles; but I remember most clearly the fascination of the sunlight for Cynthia. At last she fell asleep in her encircling roller towel and was borne away to quarters more luxurious for a nap. But, like Henry Adams, she never forgot that sunlight. I know. For twenty years later, when we read together of his education and came to the yellow kitchen floor, I saw her face.

II

Just as soon as single words, laboriously conned, began to lose their personal identities in the teasing rhythm of sentences, I began to read to Cynthia on the top of the old secretary. But it was not long before she outdistanced me. For purposes of reading we were encircled by the same towel, and, sitting thus closely, she could follow with her eyes my somewhat halting phrases. Mere letters she eschewed with fine scorn — she had no time for them. It was

words she wanted, and she learned them with the fabled ease of young Alexander in conflict with Homer.

No longer did I hold the book when once she had learned to discover what lay concealed within those neat symbols, pacing so sedately across the plain white pages. Years afterward she told me that the most overpowering thing about first learning to read was the sudden understanding that those unostentatious, orderly marks might be stories — stories which, indeed, baffled sleep and chimney corners; and thus early did she acquire that dissatisfaction with ear-reading only which ever belongs to the true lover of books.

At seven I was sent, protesting, to the village school, to the same building and the same teacher that had nurtured my father and mother, while Cynthia stayed at home and on cold December mornings read to the baby, both of them securely tied to the posts of the secretary. But in those halcyon days of municipal poverty there was relief in the long vacation which occupied the months of January and February. Then, on mornings when the weather forbade long hours of coasting or when we were needed as nursemaids, we

mounted with assistance to our Parnassus, submitted to the roller towels, which now bound not only us to the posts but the baby to us, opened our battered red copy of Grimm, and were off!

I am sure Grimm was our favorite. We were blind in those earliest days to the greater delicacy of Hans Andersen and to that wistful, all-pervading pity which makes wise and kind his simplest tale. We loved Elsa, to be sure, with her poor, nettle-stung hands, and the cruel concreteness of the Klauses, Little and Big, delighted us; but the Tin Soldier was a tin soldier, and his steadfastness in succeeding misfortunes was wearisome when compared with Hansel and Gretel, standing hand in hand before the gingerbread house of the wicked witch.

Oh, that house of houses, made with magic hands! With what light, beneficent and perpetual, have the shining eyes of countless children surrounded thee — thy roofs of crystal sugar, thy doorposts of striped candy! For translators — contrary, indeed, to custom and tradition — have for once improved upon the original by a more lavish and concrete rendering of that phrase *mit Kuchen gedeckt*,

penned with much smacking of the lips, we may believe, by those good brothers of Hanau — those scholars who could forsake even the interchange of consonants for such a house as that! Only a few weeks since, when, in an endeavor to bring home to a class of college freshmen the appeal in concrete imagery, I asked them the one thing in *Hansel and Gretel* which they remembered most vividly, I was answered by a chorus of twenty-five voices, crying, "The witch's house!" And never shall I forget how the geraniums and heliotrope of a Berlin *Platz* suddenly became a blurred and colorful mist when I, a homesick student, standing alone before the bright windows of a *Konditorei*, saw the little house, resplendent and satisfying, atop a three-tiered cake!

Gulliver we had in words of one syllable, a prose arrangement which early annoyed Cynthia. She used to point with amused tolerance at such disjointed words as Em-man′-u-el Col-lege and Glum′-dal-clitch; and I feel sure that not even the terrifying experiences of Gulliver in the arms of the Brobdingnagian monkey ever quite dispelled from her mind the patronage of that particular editor. But for me the tale was the thing, and such insults

I willingly brooked. I early discovered that, as a narrative, "Lilliput" was far inferior to "Brobdingnag" in incident, characterization, and descriptive detail — a childish criticism which the years have but strengthened and justified; and on Gulliver days, as soon as we had once freed our hero from the strings, the showers of arrows, and the scouts scouting across his chest, and had witnessed his triumphal capture of the enemy's fleet of ships, we spent our time in Lorbrulgrud. The adventures with the spaniel, the frog, the giant rat, and the wasps, which hummed "louder than the drones of many bagpipes," the story of the jovial dwarf who threw Gulliver into the bowl of cream, and the climaxing and terrible incident of the eagle with the ring of Gulliver's box in his monstrous beak — of these we never tired. The great Dean was, I think, responsible also for the birth of literary appreciation in the baby, for at two he laughed quite hilariously at the idea, expounded to him laboriously by Cynthia and me, of a baby's rattle "filled with great stones and fastened by a cable to the child's waist."

I have never been able to concur with Stevenson in his opinion of the Robinsons, whom,

one will remember, he calls a "dreary family." Prayerful and pedantic though they were, they were never dreary to Cynthia and me. Their "plethora of goods" did not disturb us, nor did their many devotions. The latter, indeed, to New England children of the early nineties, still beset by Puritanism, seemed but right and proper, though always a whit embarassing. Moreover, there clung in those days to *The Swiss Family Robinson* a romance which none of our other books possessed. It marked our entrance into that charmed and luminous circle of those who buy books, not to give away, but to have and to hold. For we had bought *The Swiss Family Robinson* at the grocery store for the price of twelve soap wrappers, taken from the cakes of yellow laundry soap and hoarded with jealous care in one of the little glass-knobbed drawers of the old secretary.

The memory of that Saturday morning when Cynthia and I, soap wrappers in hand, stood in delightful indecision before the shelf in the grocery store which held the books will long remain untarnished. The cheapest of editions then meant nothing to us, the rusty cloth covers, the tiny, half-blurred print on

the worst of paper. We took long to choose between *The Three Musketeers* — which we pronounced, in some show of humor, with the accent on the second syllable, and which contained some bad pictures of fights, many and single-handed — and *The Swiss Family Robinson.* The opening paragraphs at length decided us. To children reared on tales of the sea there was more of immediate excitement and interest in the details of a shipwreck than in those happenings, however unprecedented, which were heralded in front of The Jolly Miller on that first Monday in the month of April in the year 1625.

As we grew older and the old secretary included yet another child on its broad topmost shelf, many were the books we read thereon. Jane Porter, Marryat, George Macdonald, Harriet Martineau, Dickens in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield,* and Thackeray in all those absurdly delightful doings of the royal family of Paflagonia — these and others, their compeers, were the names we conjured with. Nor must I for a moment forget the inimitable Alice, following the gloved and waistcoated White Rabbit into the hole and drinking that equally inimitable potion flav-

ored, one remembers, with cherry tart, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffee, and hot buttered toast! For, indeed, the names of Lewis Carroll and of John Tenniel, his illustrator, were not writ in water!

But besides these there were others — bits of driftwood on uncharted seas, books borrowed from schoolmates or from the meagre Sunday-school library, a victim always to the questionable generosity of the spring housecleaner. These belonged no doubt to a quite inglorious race; they were written by unknown authors and have long since passed out of circulation; yet Cynthia and I have not forgotten them. Their pale deathbed scenes are imprinted on our minds as was that of Clarissa Harlowe on the mind of Lady Mary; their voluble moral precepts recall twinges of conscience; their lofty and impassioned cries of valor, love, and revenge still sound in our delighted ears.

There was one — what would I not give to know that some garret or village library still harbors its prototype! — entitled *Duke Rollo and His Mighty Deeds*. Its date and author are alike unknown to me; it doubtless was the least among books; and yet to it I owe the birth

of a great desire and its incomparable fulfillment. That volume of faded blue, with a mace and a battle-axe crossed on its frayed cover, chronicled in grandiloquent phrases the life and times of Duke Rollo of Normandy. From it we learned that, after Duke Rollo was exiled from his northern home and ere he journeyed southward, he lived for a season among some picturesque and romantic islands known as the Hebrides. I must at this point unblushingly state that Cynthia and I called these islands the Hē-brides. Indeed, it was not until ten years later, when with Wordsworth we listened entranced to the song of that solitary reaper,

> Breaking the silence of the seas
> Among the farthest Hebrides,

that we regretfully understood what loveliness had for so long escaped our willing ears. We were sadly conscious of the insult we had accorded a place so beautiful. For Wordsworth's lines, tender and haunting with suggestion, but added weight, as well as a much needed grace, to the blustering and pompous assertion of Duke Rollo, every ringing syllable of which after thirty years is as clear as it was then.

"And I would," cried the great Duke Rollo,

raising his mighty battle-axe on high before his armèd hosts, "that I need not conquer. For I know of no land under the skies of God more to be desired than these same islands, lying like purple grapes in these dark blue seas!"

It was that figure of Duke Rollo's that stayed long with Cynthia and me and that finally, five years ago, carried us up the high Scottish coast north of Oban, of Port Appin, of Loch Eil. Late one August afternoon, sailing west from Mallaig, whose gray, desolate houses cling like barnacles to the wind-swept cliffs, we saw rocky islands, near, far, dim in the hazy distance and in the hovering twilight. Purple they were, from blossoming heather, or from the evening light, or from years of dreams, and they rose from the dark blue sea like a great bunch of loosely hung grapes.

"I suppose," said Cynthia, watching a last shaft of sunlight as it lay on the most distant island, "I suppose Duke Rollo left for France on just such an afternoon as this."

III

My mother was directly responsible for an original but not wholly commendable habit which, through her precept and example, early

fastened itself upon us. Reacting, as she did, strongly and unmistakably to persons and situations within or without the covers of books, she quite naturally encouraged in us, not only those reactions themselves, but upon occasion the means of registering the same. While we were still very young, it had been her custom, in reading to us, to pass the book solemnly to Cynthia and me in turn, so that we might give tangible vent to our indignation toward some particularly hateful character by loudly slapping the picture of him and his cruelty. If there were no picture, we slapped the monstrous words that chronicled such dark behavior. Thus the wicked stepmother in *Snow White*, in the guise of a peddler, with her fatal apple and her poisoned comb, was early and often rewarded by a shower of serious and righteous blows, as was also dastardly Big Klaus who slew his grandmother, and the wolf who drew near, with mincing step and heart of darkness, to the home of Red Riding Hood.

In recent years my mother has apologized for this teaching. She fears now, she says, that it inculcated prejudice and intolerance; but, being in league with the Comic Spirit, she

claims an excuse for it on the modern grounds that she married before she had had time to "express herself" sufficiently! The habit stayed long with Cynthia and me; indeed, it was not so many years ago that I discovered my hand pounding away in fury upon the Thwackum and Square pages in *Tom Jones;* and I doubt not that the custom might have lingered up to this very day were it not that the old and completely satisfying villains have passed out of books and of life, and that all conceivable modern behavior, actual or fictional, has become, in the light of the new learning, neither righteous nor unrighteous, but merely problematical!

With the old secretary and mornings thereon is the habit indissolubly associated. Reading in *The Scottish Chiefs* of the cruel death of the Lady Marion, the Sweet Lady of Ellerslie, at the hands of that venomous Heselrigge, tyrant of Lanark, Cynthia, her small, high voice vibrant with contempt and anger, her hand poised to strike, moved the book toward me, and together we thundered upon the picture or the page just retribution. Thus we dutifully gave visible and vigorous sign of our disgust for all meretricious behavior on the

part of witches and stepmothers, elder sisters, grudging schoolmasters, and wicked kings, although it is but fair to say that we were often impatient at the necessary interruption.

But there came a morning, and that early, when there was seemingly no place to slap, when Cynthia's tear-filled eyes looked at mine and mine looked at Cynthia's, and when there drifted about our warm, quiet kitchen, above the sunlight on the floor, within the fragrance of things cooking, a shadowy perception, strange and disturbing. We had been reading a new *Hans Andersen* which had come for Cynthia's birthday, in gay red covers with eleven white swans winging their way toward Elsa and her magical shirts; and for the first time we had become acquainted with the Little Match Girl. There she sat in the cold dawn, — with red cheeks and a smile upon her lips, — in the corner, leaning against the wall, frozen to death on the last evening of the Old Year, so pitiful a figure we both forgot that in her death she had visions for her company.

And who was there to blame for it all — who to slap? Not the boy who had run away with her supper, cruel though he was. Not her father, who, if she went home, would surely

beat her. No, it was not they who had done this thing.

Then, as to Job in the Land of Uz and to Sophocles by the Ægean, there came thus early to Cynthia and me on the top of the old secretary the dim knowledge of that sad and eternal questioning, encircling and uniting all mankind. But for a short moment, a little while, it was clearly better with us than with Job and Sophocles. For we in those days could turn at once to the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, who was surely to blame for it all, and slap away to our hearts' content.

THE SAINTS IN MAINE

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I

In Maine, twenty-five years ago, the saints endured a questionable, not to say a sinister reputation, which even today in most portions of that fair state they have yet to live down. Only some half-dozen of them were, under scriptural sanction, accepted in our seacoast village and those by no appellation save their given names. The text for the Sunday sermon was taken from Matthew, never from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew; he who, standing in the porch of the high priest's palace, thrice denied his Lord, whose very imperfections should make him the willing intercessor for us all, received from us no glorifying prefix to soften and illumine his remorseful condemnation; and that cultured Greek physician and poet, the author of the *Third Gospel* and the *Book of the Acts*, was, in matters of address at least, accorded no more respect than was tendered the village idiot, who bore his name.

And yet, in spite of our unwillingness to canonize by the words of our mouths these

flaming spirits, we did sing loudly on Sunday evenings our intention of gathering with them by the river on that day which is to herald a new and spiritual democracy; and on certain solemn occasions we repeated together in strained accents that phrase from the Apostles' Creed which bound us to believe in communion with them — a phrase which early caused me no little anxiety. My Sunday-school teacher, a patient, quite scripless pilgrim of the straight and narrow way, explained to me on the occasion of my "joining" the village church that this statement to which I was expected to pledge my complete faith might be interpreted in one of two ways: either it referred to our belief in the celestial conversations of those pious souls who were already among the blest, or it strove to deify the conferences of the faithful who were still among us. Neither explanation satisfied my groping, fourteen-year-old mind. The first was too remote for comfort. The second, which suggested an apotheosized parish meeting or Christian Endeavor convention, struck me, even at that age, as both absurd and blasphemous. Such communion savored at best, of only a Barmecide feast! But when, unwilling to accept

either, I stammeringly asked if the provoking words might not possibly suggest unknown yet open avenues of grace between us and certain Shining Ones, I was told in horror-stricken tones that such an interpretation was contrary to the nature of the church to which I had sworn my allegiance, that it savored strongly of the pernicious doctrine of a sect to be avoided, and that I must immediately take steps to correct my error by repairing to the parsonage for more light!

As to saints outside the scriptural wing, we knew almost nothing of them until we entered college where they were held in somewhat higher repute. The thought and imagination of our childhood which they might have nourished and colored existed without them like the dimly burning wicks of the prophet. In the village academy, to be sure, we heard of Saint Francis, who was also presented to us with no prefix and whom for years I associated with a thin, long-faced gentleman sent out by some society to deliver at our front doors folded verses of Scripture called Comfort Powders. His sermon to his little brothers, the birds, his bearing in his arms the vision-struck little boy who had tied his cord to that

of the saint, the delightful chronicle of the wolf of Gubbio — those which should be the birthright of every child were not ours. We heard, too, of Joan of Arc, then unsainted, but as in the case of Saint Francis she was presented from the moral rather than from the romantic viewpoint; and we little knew what treasures were hidden beneath that ancient Domrémy tree and by that quiet pool, which once imaged in its crystal-clear depths the forms of celestial visitors.

Our slight acquaintance with both saints, indeed — and it was very slight — left us rather stupidly impressed by their great goodness and by their service to mankind which we must ever seek to emulate; but the grace and beauty of themselves, the incidents, human and humorous, clustering about them, the consciousness that they had known God, and not by precept — with these we had nothing to do. In fact, my sister Cynthia and I, but recently comparing notes, agree that the special brand of Puritanism to which we were subjected a quarter of a century ago was devoid of any beauty save the ethical and moral, and in proof of our contention recall with amusement how our adolescent delight in the tri-

umphal glory of Saint Paul's life and words was once quenched by the caustic observation of our Sunday-school teacher that in view of his early sins he richly *deserved* the stonings and the shipwrecks, the cold and the nakedness, the perils in various parts so joyously chronicled in his second letter to Corinth. We knew that Saint George had once killed a dragon; we had a picture of Saint Cecilia playing an organ among the falling roses of cherubs; and we surmised that Saint Patrick, whom we vaguely associated with spectacular achievements in Ireland, was the subject of jokes in other and more metropolitan places.

It is hardly necessary to add that the Virgin, though held to be blessed among women, was revered among us only because of reflected glory. Our Protestant community, like all others of its kind, stood immovably against Mariology, and even in ancient and beautiful legends saw a dimming of the hard, bright light of truth! So Cynthia and I never glimpsed the wheatfield by the Nile as it sprang to golden harvest at one gracious word; nor heard of that simple brother who, in spite of much labor and sorrow, could learn but "Ave Maria!" but from whose dead lips sprang

a white lily in token of Our Lady's understanding and honor; nor stood with the monks in amazed wonder to see her wipe with a fold of her blue mantle the sweat from the brow of Barnabas, the juggler, head downward before her statue and juggling with six brass balls and twelve shining knives.

II

Such, then, was our provincialism in matters spiritual; yet New England hills and valleys might have nurtured saints and pilgrims as well as Ægean heroes and immortals. The latter — be it said with thanksgiving! — were not kept far from us; and neither struggles with the aorist and optative nor despair over verbs in μι could dull for us the sudden and stupendous perception, born of Homeric hexameters, that beauty might exist for itself alone. Indeed, for the fortunate New England children subjected to them, the classics struck wells of water in a Puritan Valley of Baca; and Nausicaa with her maidens quite uselessly playing at ball, presumably on a Monday morning, lighted many candles in the youthful imaginations of Maine.

In these last years, however, conscious of our loss, Cynthia and I, though still Puritan in certain inescapable moments, have embraced the saints, and in their charming companionship have found true the genial promise of John Donne concerning the times and seasons of God: "He," writes that most intriguing of divines, "can bring thy summer out of winter, though thou have no spring."

Gazing from a Maine hilltop across the waters of Penobscot Bay, we have seen a land and sea kind and clement enough for any saint, Saint Francis journeying on brown roads with his brothers, Saint Columba encircling the islands in his coracle of reeds. And of late we have been more clearly conscious of that curious, seemingly inconsistent mysticism in the New England character, yearning in the eyes of farmhouse women, wise and sure in the gaze of those who go down to the sea in ships. Yet those tales and legends which might nourish hungry and repressed imaginations, refresh the careworn, and add grace and truth to hard, unquiet lives, have remained, in larger part at least, the legacy of the Mother Church, that institution which old Cotton Mather in his *Wonders of the Invisible*

World calls in stern uncompromise the devil's eldest son!

At times we become frankly personal over our grievance. Cynthia feels that she has been disastrously cheated in the matter of Saint Bride. Let even an inadequate flock of sheep, grazing in a rocky pasture or pensive beneath sunlit beeches, come within her view, and she discourses freely and rebelliously upon her loss. Had she but known in her childhood of that Celtic saint, she affirms, her driving of the family cow on misty mornings had been fraught with excitement and the familiar roadsides bathed in apocalyptical splendor. But not to have heard of her existence until the late twenties is a fact difficult to endure graciously. Always after her philippic, Cynthia stands apart from me and looks at the sheep; and then I know that she is saying to herself certain lines of Fïona Macleod, dear to us both and to many others who knew his haunting measures in those days when literary endeavor was freer and less impaired:

> To this day on Am Fheill Bridge shepherds are wont to hear in the mists the crying of innumerable young lambs and that without the bleating of the ewes, and by this token know

that holy Saint Bride has passed that way, bringing with her the countless lambs soon to be born on all the hills and pastures of the world.

In contemplating my own deprivations I am torn between Saints Ursula and Teresa of Avila, those learned ladies of the sixth and sixteenth centuries, the one who would have been my joy at fourteen, the other who is to-day my special solace and delight. Both escaped me until a few short years ago, and, like Cynthia, I too, am remonstrant. How appealing is Saint Ursula of Brittainy, the patron saint of school-girls and of those who strive to teach them! A quaint biographer describes her thus:

She was not only wonderfully beautiful and gifted with all the external graces of her sex, but accomplished in all the learning of the time. Her mind was a perfect storehouse of wisdom and knowledge: she had read about the stars and the courses of the winds; all that had ever happened in the world from the days of Adam she had by heart; the poets and philosophers were to her what childish recreations are to others; but above all she was profoundly versed in theology and school divinity, so that the doctors were confounded by her argumentative powers.

With her fair and glorious company of eleven thousand virgins she undertook a journey to the holy shrines throughout Europe, and was miraculously conducted over the rocks and snows of the Alps by six angels, "who went before them perpetually, clearing the road from all impediments, throwing bridges over mountain torrents, and even at night pitching tents for their shelter and refreshment."

And in what a comely manner did the eleven thousand meet the martyrdom, which they had sought, at the hands of fierce barbarians "who rushed upon the virgins as a pack of gaunt and hungry wolves might fall on a flock of milk-white lambs!" What wonder that the mediaeval artist suffered anxiety in that it was impossible to devise any means by which the whole faithful company might be represented — in that there were several thousands to whom justice could not be done. It may be said, however, that the docile, unromantic piety on the faces of the ten at Bruges whom Hans Memling managed to depict within the shelter of Saint Ursula's robe, leaves one somewhat grateful for the limitations of art!

Saint Teresa of Avila, that Spanish mystic

of the sixteenth century, who preached and lived a life of harmony and order, has for some time past delighted Cynthia and me. Again we are regretful that at least a taste for saint-hood was not given earlier to us, for then we should not have shied a bit at Lady Lovat's thick, blue book and set it aside for a season while we devoured shorter and less worthy tales of less arresting souls. How like the New England character was that of this Spanish saint with its strong practicality, its good sense, its natural shrewdness, its candor in the face of superiors! Saint Teresa insisted upon the most rigorous of discipline, had no sympathy with the vagueness and vagaries often mistaken for mystical states, and once dared to reprove God Himself for procrastination and indifference, whereupon He immediately responded with money for a new foundation of the Order. One day while frying some fish she had a vision — but she did not leave the fish! What a subject she might have afforded for sympathetic presentation and discussion before one of those first club meetings of the women of Boston, organized by Mistress Anne Hutchinson, who herself claimed to possess "a peculiar indwelling of the Holy Ghost!"

For in spite of divergence in things temporal, things eternal differ only in interpretation whether they happen in a Carmelite convent or on Beacon Hill, where, it may be said in passing, a certain good Bostonian once dismissed his good cook because she timed her boiling eggs by Ave Marias and Pater Nosters instead of by the kitchen clock! Between the *Remarkable Providences* of Increase Mather and *The Little Flowers* of Saint Francis there is singularly little difference save in nomenclature; and doubtless God Who allowed Parson Avery to stand in deep waters as though his feet were upon dry ground was not far removed from the angel called Marvellous who once bore good Brother Bernard across a dark and terrible river. It must be admitted, however, that the cherubim, who in all the great books according to old Richard de Bury, expand their wings, flash their swords less ominously in the *Little Flowers*.

"What sweet contentments doth the soul enjoy by the senses?" asks William Drummond of Hawthornden in his *Cypress Grove;* and then answers himself by the affirmation that they are the "gates and windows of its knowledge, the organs of its delight." The

plaintive sound of Saint Francis Xavier's silver bell calling the children to their devotions along the white, sun-swept streets of Goa; the holy light that surrounded Saint Francis and Saint Clare as they ate together sitting on the bare ground, whereat the men and the women of Assisi wondered; the red roses of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary; the black and bitter cold which Saint Brendan endured for five years among the pillars of glittering ice; the sweet perfume as of innumerable gardens which drifted from the cell of the dying Saint Vincent when the angels visited him — the generous and gracious influences of such as these, like the "large and melodious thoughts" which descended upon Walt Whitman as he walked beneath the trees, might a quarter of a century ago have ministered unto Cynthia and me had the saints been accorded good standing along the coast of Maine.

III

But in our childhood there were few shifting and colorful rays in the comfortless glare of Puritan truth and little warmth in the means of grace afforded us. One was good be-

cause it was right, dutiful, and altogether desirable to be good, not because it was beautiful and harmonious; and the Greek ideal of a barely discernible separation between the ethical and the aesthetic would have been scorned among us, in spite of our classical heritage, as a "flighty" doctrine, one obviously contrary to the dictates of plain, common sense! The truth was the truth — to be determined after a simple and logical manner, then embraced, and ever afterward tenaciously held. Even children must not stray from it. "You may believe in fairies," an uncompromising elder once told Cynthia and me, "but you must *know* they are not true!"

Truth, justice, duty, righteousness — great and necessary names, indeed! But to many of us they are the "frail spells" of Shelley's Hymn:

> whose uttered charm might not avail to sever
> From all we hear and all we see
> Doubt, chance, and mutability.

Our stumbling feet demand easier and more tangible means of approach, for we, too, would see from afar the Shining City of God.

And what is truth? we ask with Pilate, not jestingly, as Sir Francis Bacon would have it, but with the bewilderment which, for aught we know, was in his voice. What is truth and where is it? Has the philosopher or the theologian found it for any save himself? Is it to be apprehended only by hypothesis and syllogism? Rather is it not to be apprehended by the individual when he is once conscious of a quick and creative life springing up within him to become henceforth the deepest thing in his nature?

If such is true, then truth must of necessity have various forms according to the character of this creative life. To some of us it is inevitable that the truth aesthetic will transcend the truth literal, that the truth poetic and artistic is more to be desired than the truth intrinsic. Had Cynthia, driving her cow along Maine roadsides in the dog-days of August, but known of Saint Bride and her countless lambs, there might earlier and with less difficulty have sprung up in her conscience-ridden little soul that quick and creative life; and had I earlier loved Saint Ursula, gathering about her the eleven thousand spotless virgins in the enameled meadows of Brittainy,

something might have happened even to my more stodgy nature. For although our Puritan forbears were surely right in condemning both tales as false when viewed, as they viewed them, in the light of truth intrinsic, their grace and beauty are just as surely a part of that Truth which must be God.

And when, one asks wistfully, has there been in the long "chronicles of wasted time" a sadder need of beauty than in these latter days? Of that Beauty which holds within itself the Truth of Harmony and of Order? That Beauty for which Plato implores through the prayer of Socrates at the conclusion of the *Phaedrus*, a prayer which, I doubt not, has been the delight of all intellectual saints from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas!

"Give me Beauty in the inward soul, and may the outward and inward man be at one. May I reckon the wise to be wealthy and may I have such a quantity of gold as none but the temperate may carry! Anything more? That prayer, I think, is enough for me!"

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